



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

**TRANSITIONS AMIDST TRANSITION:
THE JOURNEY OF MALTESE STUDENTS FROM COMPULSORY
EDUCATION TO FURTHER EDUCATION AND/OR WORK**

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Abstract

Further Education (FE) is almost a new venture on the Maltese Islands particularly for UK NVQ Levels 1 and 2. In 2001 the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) introduced the Foundation Certificate: A Further Education (FE) access course without entry requirements.

Drawing mainly on the study by Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000), Bourdieu's habitus and structure (1977; 1990; 1993) as well as Evans' bounded agency (2002; 2007) and Evans and Heinz's (1993: 1994) transition types, this thesis explores the transitory experience of eight female students from Compulsory to Further Education. Between 2007 and 2010 these students narrated their experiences prior to entry at MCAST, as students on the MCAST campus, during their work placements as well as on their workplace.

Findings indicate that FE and work were chosen by elimination of the academic path even though it seems that school did not prepare the participants for these routes. The MCAST-BTEC formative assessment system was deemed harder to get used to but fairer than the exam-based system. At MCAST students felt free to make their own choices and were treated as adults.

Work placement experience for students seems to influence course choice. Full-time workers (ex-students) indicated that they were given a lot of training, and that work was an alternative learning environment. This was important to retain their job and to further their studies.

This thesis identifies three transition trajectories as well as a model for understanding the self in transition to FE within the Maltese context by identifying theories which are adaptable to this particular scenario. It also provides key learnings for policy makers and practitioners within the Maltese educational context. These include the exposure of students to MCAST, in-service training for subject and guidance teachers at service in secondary schools and guidelines for standardized induction as well as monitoring programmes aimed at increasing student retention. These strategies would ease the transition period making both MCAST and secondary schools more inclusive learning environments.

Chapter 1

Transitions Amidst Transition

1.0 Introduction

Formal Further Education is still in its infant stages in Malta and is still very much in transit. New courses are continuously opening to encourage school-leavers and adult learners to further their studies and to keep abreast with the latest technological advances and skill requirements in our industries.

This chapter will explore why the study of transitions to further education is important for Malta. It will also explore why such a study is important for me as a researcher, as well as give some background to how this research will be carried out. It will also start to explore the complexity of these transitions and some of the factors that can influence them. This complexity and uniqueness was captured by eight case studies which were carried out over a four-year period between 2007 and 2010 capturing the transitions of eight female students from their final year in compulsory schooling to work and/or further education. This chapter concludes with a specification of my key research questions and an overview of the thesis chapters.

1.1 Why Transitions to Further Education?

Further Education (FE) and the awareness of it being a significant priority in modern society is a relatively new concept for the Maltese Islands. With the rebirth of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology in 2001, FE has taken a professional boost as compared to the shabby impression that trade schools had in the 1980's. A new avenue in FE was brought about with courses at UK NVQ Levels 1 and 2 more commonly known in Malta as the Foundation Certificate Course and the First Diploma Courses respectively. Students could enrol for a Level 1 course even though they did not possess any passes at

ordinary level with the only pre-requisite being the completion of compulsory education. The fast pace with which the Maltese Educational Scenario has changed and is continuing to change is also a transitory state in itself. In fact, Sultana (1998) refers to Malta as “A Mediterranean Microstate in Transition”.

MCAST thus started foundation courses across six of the current ten Institutes in 2001. However, it was only recently (MCAST, 2009) that senior management discussed the fact that around half of the total amount of students in some of the Malta Qualifications Framework Level 2 Courses¹ (UK NVQ Level 1) were dropping out. This called for a revision and standardisation of the course components. Such changes were made without any importance being given to the experience of the students themselves.

In my experience this type of transition can be a “make-or-break” situation for the individual. Such experiences in or outside schooling, during these vulnerable teenage years, can leave individuals lumped with the effects of taking, lacking to take or not knowing how to take decisions, for their rest of their entire life. In a small island state like Malta, limited resources and lack of income generating natural resources ultimately results in a sheer unavailability of flexible educational options which would be suited to particular needs or expectations. Flexibility necessitates more human resources for record keeping and support mechanisms. Although the situation is improving with the addition of new courses and access routes, the support mechanisms and career advisory programmes available for students are not providing the necessary support which should accompany them throughout this transitory period. A student in Malta has more versatility and options to choose from but there are also more career trajectories to take note of and transitions from one area of study to another at the next level are still not that fluid. This at times leads to students who either

¹ The Malta Qualifications Framework may be found in Appendix I of this thesis.

drop out from the system or who have to start their course of studies from scratch. The system in itself cannot afford such a waste because the government provides stipends to all students who intend to further their studies. Dropouts thus miss out on their own time and waste resources for the country.

Another issue warranting attention is the change that BTEC courses introduced at MCAST have brought about in the types of assessment. Secondary school students would be accustomed to a completely summative-based form of assessment with a half-yearly and an annual examination each year. On the other hand, at MCAST, students have to work continuously on assignments, which are the building blocks of their qualification based on specific pass, merit and distinction grading criteria. This can be said to be a radical change for these students where they have to learn the ropes of competency-based assessment as opposed to the competitive marking approach deeply ingrained in them throughout their primary and secondary schooling.

Furthermore, young people in Malta are now faced with other challenges accompanying their studies. The information technology era may facilitate access to knowledge but it is also an era of distractions which comes in the form of chat programs, mobile telephony and social applications. These artifacts are relatively cheap and are also less accessible and user friendly to the older generation. This enables youngsters to have a life which is more private than the one afforded by their parents who, in their days as adolescents, could only have access to a landline phone. Furthermore it seems that young people are more individualistic than their parents could afford to be when they were of the same age. Individuality is conveyed in two ways: Firstly they are more likely to spend time on their own and secondly if this is true, they are likely to have more freedom in taking their own decisions because their own world is larger than the one available to their

predecessors. Possible reasons for this can be, that in their own world facilitated by information technology, they are more often than not more literate than their parents and consequently able to let their parents in and out of this life as they please. Nevertheless, socially, young people in Malta enjoy a relatively safe environment where, by the time these teenagers turn fourteen, most parents allow them to meet up with friends and to go out on their own. In general, it appears that Maltese young people fall into two categories, those who are fully committed to a group (be it political, environmental, religious or social) and those who are not committed at all (EuroMed Youth Platform, 2010). Accession to the European Union has provided and will continue to provide both challenges and opportunities for Maltese young people. More than that we are living in a world which is a global village where many of the problems and challenges facing youths are common in different countries, regions and continents. It is possible to argue that the main challenges facing the youths of Malta today are: Education and its challenges for more opportunities; social life particularly exploitation and drugs; as well as the environment. Unemployment is also a threat to youth caused by the changing needs of modern economy. In fact nearly half of the unemployed in Malta are youths aged between 16 and 27 (EuroMed Youth Platform, 2010) It also seems that nowadays, youths are also feeling the competition with other European youths who come to Malta for work. Unfortunately, Malta records one of the highest rates of illiteracy in the EU with 7.2% of the population from 10 years of age upwards who are completely illiterate. (Census of Population and Housing, 2005)

Of particular relevance to me in setting the basic scenario for this thesis is the issue highlighted by Levinson (1986). In his work on life stage models he asks about the relative emphasis that is given to the actual structures or stages as compared to the transitional, structure-changing periods. Transitions for Levinson are opportunities for changing structure whilst the stages are opportunities for structure building. For Levinson, building and

changing should be equally important but periods of change have been relatively ignored owing to the greater emphasis placed on stages. He mentions Piaget's developmental theory, as an example, because the latter tended to focus mainly on the sequence of structures. Levinson argues that when Piaget spoke of a stage, he meant a structure. Piaget's successive stages in cognitive development form a hierarchical series of cognitive levels or structures. Although recognizing that transitions are required for the shift from one structure to another, he did not study the transitional process. He treated the transitions as lacunae or zones of ambiguity between the structures, rather than as stages in their own right, possessing a distinctive character of their own and warranting deserved study and attention. By and large, Piaget studied the structures rather than the course of development as a continuing evolution. In contrast, Levinson (1986) mentions that there is now a growing body of research on transitions; for example, periods of change and readjustment following a major life event such as marriage, divorce, the birth of a child, retirement, or the loss of a loved one as indicated in examples cited by Levinson himself, namely Hareven and Adams, (1982) as well as Lowenthal, Thurnher and Chiriboga, (1975). Levinson points out that in this work, the focus on the process of change is often so strong that little attention is given to the states (structures) that precede and follow it and such is the focus of my thesis.

Levinson criticizes that much of the recent theory and research on transitions is centered narrowly on adaptation and change stemming from a single event. This work contributes to our knowledge of events and adaptations, but it is generally not based on a theory of adult development, and it cannot, in itself, generate a theory of adult development (Levinson, 1980 in Levinson, 1986). Although the subject of this thesis may indicate that the single event is the change in school or in starting work, this thesis acknowledges the presence of other changes occurring in the participants' lives and it does not purport to establish a theory of development but to find ways in which we can start to understand the

experiences of the Maltese female transition to further education (FE). In studying the development of the life structure, Levinson gives equal weight to the structure-building periods and the structure-changing periods. Adults spend almost as much time in the latter as in the former, and both play a crucial part in adult development. Levinson studies the sequence by which individuals build, live within, modify, and rebuild the life structure over a span of many years. This thesis aims to do so over the span of four years.

For these reasons, this thesis explores the transitory pathways of eight students from 2007 till 2010 between the ages of 15 and 19. Their transition is specific in a way because they had all attended the same secondary school between ages 11 and 15. This particular sample was chosen because these students had all intended to take up the vocational route rather than the academic route and had intended to attend MCAST. Their accounts depicting their experience on transition would help to understand their successes, their difficulties and their perceptions. They relate to the way in which MCAST, work or other educational institutions as structures are working for them, if at all, and whether they would suggest any changes which would help improve the service offered. These students also talk about their experience during their secondary education and how well or not this is helping them at MCAST. They talk about how this experience is changing them and whether they have adapted to the needs of the institution or vice versa. They would share their life, their interests, their family, their job and their aspirations for the future. Thus the fact that the transition from compulsory education to FE is only one of the focal points of a broader picture in itself is interesting because it remains a unique and individual experience with some commonalities. There are constructs and types of transitions which help us understand the narratives that shape the individual experiences of the students I intend to focus on. Thus the transitive experience from compulsory to FE is just one context which will help in understanding the larger picture. Although transition shall be the main focus, one

must always keep in mind that it is just one part of the whole scenario. In fact, Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000: x) point out that their stories “*challenge the notion of singular self and weave the elements of a life in which education is but one, albeit substantial component.*” Thus, talking about transition allows the involvement of a broader focus than is the actual transitory experience per se. Furthermore, this angle seems to be encouraged by scholars in the field (Ball et al., 2000; Evans, 2002: 2007)

1.2 Fitting In As The Researcher: Background and Attitude

Before embarking on this doctorate, I had carried out four other research projects; one each for undergraduate and postgraduate studies in psychology and two for teacher-training qualifications. All these projects had a strong quantitative and statistical component which was very difficult for me to leave behind as numbers always gave me a degree of certainty. I also taught quantitative research methods and statistics at undergraduate level. Thus this shift is in itself a personal transition from a positivist quantitative research perspective to an interpretative stance. This reflected my character in that I was adamant to learn something new which I took very slowly and in stages. Admittedly, in the initial phases I wanted to create predictive validity testing on the aptitude tests that were being used to recruit students on courses. Then as I started reading and reflecting on transitions in general as well as the good number of transitions that I myself was experiencing, I decided to develop a longitudinal study following up students by interviewing them at regular periods. This gave me the possibility to learn and to develop my research as I went along. A clarification is due here in describing the transitions that I myself went through whilst I was writing this thesis. In my personal life, I became a parent and also underwent marital separation and annulment procedures. Moreover during the time in which I was a full-time student my life changed from a comfortable position in secondary school to one rife with difficulties at the Junior College. The difficulty was further exacerbated with the loss of my maternal grandfather Frans to

whom I was very close. The transition for me was not an easy one and I found it very difficult to settle down. I was unhappy with the choice of subjects namely physics, chemistry and biology which I still managed to attain for entry into university. However, looking back I would have chosen a different route and perhaps I would have been better prepared for my undergraduate studies had I chosen philosophy and sociology for my studies at Advanced Level. However, getting a B grade in fourteen subjects at ordinary level made subject choice even harder and the fact that I took psychology at university was a relief because it integrated well with my many frames of mind. However, this was a risk I took and one in which I succeeded. These experiences which are filling my present and have been somewhat shaped by my past have kindled an interest to study what goes on in the changes that individuals need to face between being secondary school students and college students or workers, taking also into account that their life is not only made by experiences at school but also their family, social networks and their own need to develop as future adults.

Another link to transitions was the different roles I had at MCAST. When I first joined in December 2002, I was responsible for students with alternative needs who attended mainstream courses. In order for their transition to be successful I visited them during their final year at school to make necessary arrangements for them to be successful at MCAST. Later, in my role as vocational teacher trainer, I lost direct contact with students but many a time I discussed difficulties that the course candidates were having in class. Lecturers at MCAST were at times worried that their students had chosen the wrong course or lost a lot of time in adjusting and in finding their way. Most of this discussion was carried through a BTEC Level 5 module which I taught, called "Induction, Initial Assessment and Support." It transpired that lecturers working in different institutes required different content and different support strategies according to the context in which they were working. Later on, in my roles as deputy director and later on as director for the Institute of Community Services, I

maintained some contact teaching hours but I am now also involved in dealing with student difficulties and complaints. Some of the students' complaints originate from the fact that they find it hard to get used to the competency-based system of assessment. Other issues are linked to the fact that they are unable to see the long-term effects of decisions they took in the past or are actively taking in the present. Yet others fail to be agentic in their behaviour or do so when it is already too late. These facets of reality can make transitions successful or otherwise, and somewhat unique in their development. Hence the choice of case studies came about both as the process of learning about the cases in transition, as well as the product of my learning (Stake, 1998). The focus on case studies and how these were used to create themes is the topic of the next section.

This research undoubtedly draws from my background as a student along the years. As I already mentioned, I read psychology together with communication studies for my undergraduate degree. Then I followed this by a post graduate certificate in education where I chose to specialise in the primary sector with a special focus on inclusive education, quite an innovative concept in the late 1990's in Malta. In the meantime I started teaching pianoforte and theory of music whilst keeping up my studies to fellowship standard in music education. I then decided to read for an MSc in Occupational Psychology where the topic of my research was directly related to the thesis since it dealt with the impact of organisational socialisation on personal change. Hence this doctoral research draws on aspects of all the qualifications that I undertook: It takes note of the importance of the self as I got to know it through my studies in psychology; it takes account of diversity and my experience in schools and in education through my studies as a teacher; it draws upon my experience in fitting in everything within my programme of studies including pianoforte studies and dancing lessons; and it also takes part of what I learnt during the days in which I worked in professional development for lecturers at MCAST by means of my studies in occupational

psychology. Moreover, I would like to point out that the choice of Sir Adrian Junior Lyceum for Girls was not one of coincidence as I happen to be an old girl of the school. I started attending that school following a period in Malta where the state decided to shut down the church schools. The church schools started offering lessons in parents' houses in groups not larger than nine but I was not invited to attend. Hence when the state opened this Junior Lyceum for those who like me were left out, I felt accepted and eternally grateful to the school. I must say that I will be eternally grateful to those teachers who did so much for us at the time. They built us a stage after school hours, they sewed costumes and they made curtains. The state sent us only the very best educators who made sure that we got a holistic education and that what we got was not only at par but even better than the other two junior lyceums for girls which had been already in existence for a considerable number of years.

I must say that from my mother's side, I am a fourth generation educator. My great grandfather was a headmaster, my grandfather was a machine fitter at the Malta Drydocks in charge of training several apprentices, amongst whom an ex-MCAST director whilst my mother taught in the primary schools for more than 30 years and was an assistant head of school for five years. My paternal grandfather was a teacher but then became a customs officer since he was better paid for he had to cater for eight children. My father taught at the Art and Design Centre (later the Institute of Art and Design at MCAST) for at least a decade but then progressed in his career until he retired as Director of Further Studies and Adult Education. Moreover, five of my aunts and four of my cousins are teachers. Undoubtedly, my grandfather Frans' experience in training apprentices and my father's experience both in teaching apprentices as well as the later years as director influenced my thinking and my commitment to MCAST, most particularly when this research treats learning as occurring outside the traditional school environment.

1.3 Choosing Case Studies

In the social sciences and human services, a case has working parts, is purposive and even has a self (Stake, 1998). Initially it was for these reasons that I wanted to treat each student as a case on its own merits. As my research evolved I found that although there were some commonalities in the transitions being experienced, the degree, extent and interpretation of these experiences was so unique that it gave specificity and boundedness. In fact, Stake (1998) mentions that cases must have specificity and boundedness to be called as such. The group of eight case studies may be considered as a single case study in that they all attended the same school and they all intended to then attend the same college. Nevertheless, once they left secondary school, their options and pathways began to unfold in very diverse ways, hence my choice of studying each of these case studies as a separate phenomenon.

Furthermore, these students needed a medium which enabled them to make their own voice heard. Although I held various posts within MCAST, I felt that it should be the student herself to talk about the experience and that I as the researcher was the facilitator and interpreter of their thoughts. This is my personal reaction to the decisions taken for the foundation level courses, which were enacted without direct reference to the students themselves.

I chose to take up case studies (Yin, 1984) and to elicit the common themes that they talked about in their accounts. Each of the three times I interviewed the participants, I revisited the themes which form the basis of my analysis. This revision of themes continues to highlight the fluidity of the transitions that these students experienced.

1.4 The Research Questions

The research was thus going to deal with the transition between compulsory education and further education and/or work. One of the difficulties here was whether I was to think about my own transitions or to keep them at bay. After all I had never been in a situation warranting the provision of FE, as these adolescents were. In the end I realised that my own experiences were always going to influence the way in which I perceived the whole scenario and this brought me back to the difficulty I had in departing from the positivist stance that had always been the point of departure of my reasoning as a researcher. I listed the research questions mostly based on my experience with students at the college but keeping in mind that the interviewees were going to be students attending the school I myself had been to from the age of nine till the age of fifteen. I had started reading some literature at this stage and shortly afterwards I did my first interviews which also acted as the pilot study and served to further refine the research questions for this thesis. The reason spurring me to undertake this research was the fact that I was interested in finding out whether students pointed to some common themes or whether their perceptions were completely individualistic. One must however also point out that all the interviewees attended the same secondary school and by no means are representative of all the educational contexts in Malta. Furthermore, the pathways undertaken by the eight students whom I have continued to interview have all developed in a somewhat different manner and two of them chose to undertake full-time employment.

As a result of this scenario, the questions that guided my research were as follows:

1. What can we discover about the experiences that shape transition for 15-18 year old Maltese students?

The meaning ascribed to this transitory experience is to be examined in this first question by eliciting the experiences that shape these transitions. The way in which the students prepared during their final year of secondary education as well as how they dealt with the outcomes of their performance in examinations at the time shall kick off the exploration here. The students were contacted shortly before they were preparing for their examinations. Issues about anticipation in relation to attending a new educational institution as well as the very fact that they had no option but to leave the past behind them and start afresh had to be explored. Students would also be in a position to identify the key themes related to transition here. They would talk about how much they perceived themselves to have changed and how their secondary school and the further education institution they attend has facilitated this change in terms of the learning community, namely teachers, students and facilities. They would also talk about their family and the kind of support they receive from the people that are significant in their lives such as close friends and boyfriends.

2. What can be discovered about factors that influence transitions from Compulsory Education to Further Education (FE) in Malta?

The second research question focuses on the influence that significant others, teachers, friends, school regulations and environments have on these transitions. Students shall be asked to relate particular experiences at work, at college or in places which they would attend to further exemplify what they have been through and to speak about what influenced them in taking such decisions.

3. How do selected Maltese students at this age view College life and other aspects of life?

In the third question, importance to the college/work life balance shall be ascribed. It is of interest for me to note whether these students view work/college and other aspects of their life as being separate. It would also be interesting to see whether their life outside college or work is influenced by what is going on at work in terms of friendship, cliques, hobbies, part-time work and other interests. Furthermore this question aims to explore whether their thoughts about college and work which are their full-time commitments spill over to the periods in which they are at home and vice-versa.

Furthermore, through my analysis, I aim to find out whether the way in which transition and concepts informing transition in non-Maltese Literature can help in understanding the experiences of these Maltese students. Here I intend to see whether these concepts and the way they are defined could be adapted to the local scene and whether modifications to them or new concepts need to be developed.

1.5 The Structure of the Thesis

This first chapter has served as an introduction and has briefly outlined the issues of this thesis with regard to the choice of transition as a subject of study. In the following chapter I will be looking at the issues, choices and progression routes that these adolescents are faced with. Subsequently, the third chapter will focus on the literature pertaining to the meanings and types of transition and on other concepts such as self, identity, agency, structure, communities of practice, role innovation and personal change which will help to interpret and to give further theoretical grounding to these experiences of transition. In the fourth chapter I will be looking at the research context(s) and on the use of case studies and interpretivism as my viewpoint for this analysis. In fifth chapter I will be introducing the students and later on I will be analysing their accounts via the themes that I

have elicited. In the final chapter I will be discussing the main issues for the policy maker, practitioner and educator as well as proposing a model for understanding compulsory education to FE transitions for female adolescents in Malta.

Chapter 2

Educational Pathways in the Maltese System

2.0 Introduction

In Chapter 1 the research focus for this thesis was introduced. Nevertheless it would be very hard for the reader of such a study to understand the meaning of it without providing it with a context. This chapter gives an overview of the Maltese society as the main context and explores the available progression routes and choices for the participants of the study. It is worth noting that Malta has integrated some aspects of the UK educational systems, but it has also traditionally been closer to other systems due to geographical proximity. Furthermore, Malta has also developed its own strategies, owing to the smallness of the country, and the limited availability of resources.

Farrugia (1991) maintains that the shortage of resources is a constant concern to small countries such as Malta. Malta has no raw materials and has had to rely on the initiative and resourcefulness of its people to build its economy (Triganza Scott and Cassar, 2005: 46). Demands for equally deserving projects each competing for staffing requirements and funds cause problems. Maltese decision makers are continually forced to weigh the benefits of investment in the educational system or in laying stronger foundations for infrastructure, or also whether rapid economic development would be more dependent on training and retraining, or in improved telecommunications and transport facilities. Moreover everybody in power has had to decide which aspects of the social and welfare provision should get priority often deciding between education or health care, the aged and persons with a disability, the unemployed or families with poor housing.

The scarcity of manpower and financial and material resources exert great pressure on the people working in the education sphere. In Malta, these shortages significantly

influence the operational and administrative style of the island's education service (Farrugia, 1991: 585). Teachers for example cannot be released from classroom duties to devote time to other important extensions of their work such as attendance at in-service training and professional development programmes and curriculum development meetings. Educational resources, which are abundant in more affluent countries, are scarce, although it is now also evident that the Maltese are making good use of European funding for such purposes.

Abela (2009) points out that the backbone of the Maltese society which is the family has, in general, undergone rapid social changes. The lifestyle that the Maltese seem to be undertaking is one where you must have money to spend. In spite of the increase in disposable income, the borrowed percent of the total disposable income increased from 20.3% in 1994 to 46.4% in 2002. Consequently, Abela maintains that at present one of the greatest challenges for the Maltese family is the change from the traditional model in that there is a steady increase of working mothers. This brings about the need for a change in the care taking responsibilities including those of children, elder parents, parents with a disability and also the supervision of adolescents. Therefore as female employment continues to increase and the population continues to age, pressures imposed on families will continue to accumulate. The husbands and wives will have to move away from the traditional role for which they were probably reared and need to respond flexibly to the new needs of their family (Abela, 2009). The family is still deemed to have an important role not only because it is still very much the building block of society but also because of the importance given to it by the church in a population where 98% of the population are Roman Catholic (CIA Factbook, 2010). Moral regulations, which are passed on by the Church, stand at the core of the society and play a crucial role in socialising the young to maintain the status quo (Visanich, 2009: 199). Maltese youth are sheltered until well over their twenties and most still live with their parents until they are married. Most individuals who decide to

move out from their parents' house raise question marks for society at large as this is still considered to be very much out of the norm. It has often been argued that the close social network within Maltese society that stems from its insularity tends to smother their individuality and their sense of adventure. (Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994 in Visanich, 2010: 199) Vigilance is seen at large also due to the lifestyle of the Maltese student who, out of geographical commodity lives with parents well into the twenties. Such issues are also described by Ball et al., (2000: 88) in that they describe Kirsty's parents as a case where since they are financing her studies and she still lives in their house, she then has to go by their rules whether she agrees or otherwise. She is allowed to take her own decisions but these are annihilated if her parents think that they are the wrong ones. Therefore it seems that for some, family has a very important role to play in transition.

The geographical size and population of Malta seem to impact a lot on the type of support and commitment that Maltese families in general give to their children. The culture is highly competitive, and jobs as well as educational opportunities are limited. Coupled with this is the new profile which has recently been given to vocational education in Malta which has led some parents to push their children into routes which were not previously available. In Malta this has been common practice in the areas of information technology (IT) and also early childhood education. Taking up IT was encouraged because a lot of jobs through foreign investment were promised (MaltaMedia, 2011).

On the other hand, early childhood educators enjoy better working conditions and shorter hours than others with the same level of education thus offering better possibilities for females to work whilst being able to rear their own children. Therefore youngsters are very much encouraged to take up these routes even if in reality they are not actually interested in them. This is seen because although most teenagers are sixteen years of age when applying at college, most are accompanied by their parents on the day. In Choice,

Pathways and Transitions Post-16 by Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) this is not always the case where it seems that some adolescents in the United Kingdom are more likely to be left to their own devices.

Nevertheless, a main element in the socialisation process of a society is education, and the more advanced the society, the more complex is its educational system (Cassar, 2009: 51). Maltese society has been planning, adjourning and restructuring its system of education so as to keep abreast of and promote the more contemporary social, economic and general needs of its members. Malta, according to Cassar (2009), has experienced educational development manifested through a consistent increase in school buildings, development of curricula and evermore-intensive teacher training. The aim of upgrading standards serves to promote national interests within a forcefully active and dynamic globalised society (Cassar, 2004: 33).

Hence, formal education aimed at decreasing the effects of a fortress-like way of thinking which was inward-looking. This was brought about largely by geo-political circumstances owing to which the inhabitants of the Maltese Islands were left in a *“limbo of uneducated existence”* (Cassar, 2009: 53). The modern curricula, methodologies and structures are the result of a direct action aimed to eradicate this insular mentality which was prevalent until 1964 which is when Malta attained independence.

Within this thesis, such an assertion made by Cassar (2009) is of particular relevance because the participants of this study are a sample of what these curricula, methodologies and structures have produced. The participants of the research reported in this thesis have attended a government primary school and then sat their 11+ exam, in which they were successful. They were then placed in a junior lyceum namely Sir Adrian Dingli Junior Lyceum for Girls, which provides education to those who reside on the northern

part of the Maltese Islands. Hence in the next section of this chapter we will be taking a look at the structure of the pre-primary provision and compulsory schooling on the Maltese Islands.

2.1 Pre-Primary Provision and Compulsory Schooling on the Maltese Islands

In the Maltese Islands all children between the ages of five and sixteen are entitled to free education regardless of age, sex, belief and economic means. The national minimum curriculum and the national minimum regulations for all schools had been established by the state according to the rights given by the Education Act in 1988. Church schools and independent schools provide education from pre-primary to upper secondary levels.

Until 2006, which is when work on this thesis was commenced, the state funded system of compulsory schooling was completely centralized and managed by the Education Division within the Ministry of Education. In the recent years, through amendments (Act XXXII /2006) to the Education Act a considerable amount of changes have taken place. The Division has given way to two Directorates, namely: The Directorate for Educational Services (DES) and the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE).

The state schools of the Maltese Islands in the current reform have been clustered together into ten colleges spread according to geographical regions. The system was piloted in the scholastic year 2005/2006 with the introduction of the first three colleges. Although one might point out that the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) had a similar structure which was introduced in 2001. By 2007/2008 all colleges were fully functional. Each college has its own independent board of governors, and will in due course be able to recruit its own staff and to manage its own budget. The principle behind this reform is to enable students to progress to secondary school with an assessment aimed at

helping the students on an individual basis. This system is in principle similar to the English system of local education authorities.

Attendance at the pre-primary level is voluntary and about 95% of the children in the age bracket between three and five years attend. Pre-primary education is co-educational and is provided free in state schools. At this level no formal teaching takes place as the main educational objectives should include activities aimed towards the development of the children's social attitudes, language and communication skills in preparation for primary education.

Education is compulsory for all children between the ages of five and sixteen. Compulsory education is sub-divided into a six-year primary cycle (five to ten or eleven years) and five years of secondary education (eleven to fifteen or sixteen years). Primary education builds on early childhood education and facilitates the development of skills, attitudes and knowledge in preparation for the secondary level. Primary schools are co-educational. The primary cycle where classes are called years can be broadly sub-divided in two cycles. The first cycle covers Years One, Two and Three where education emphasizes the development of social skills and literacy and numeracy skills, gradually progressing to more formal academic skills. During the second cycle that covers Years Four, Five and Six there is more emphasis on the academic content. Progressively till 2008, as children moved towards the end of primary education the amount of academic content increased in preparation for the Junior Lyceum Examination. The system is in itself in transition through the introduction of the college system where primary schools and secondary schools have been grouped together according to geographical areas thus providing well-defined feeder schools to the secondary institutions. The Junior Lyceum Examination will take the format of an assessment aimed at placing the student into the right setting for education at secondary level. Students will no longer progress to different schools according to their academic ability

which was previously based on their grade attainment in the national Junior Lyceum examination but will all be placed in the same college school irrespective of their assessment.

One must also point out that a transition exercise is carried out during the 3rd and 4th week of January each year when the school counsellors and the guidance teachers visit the primary schools to hold meetings for parents and all Year 6 students. The main objectives of such meetings are to make parents and students aware of the educational implications of transition from primary to secondary; prepare parents and students for this transition and inform parents and students about the role and function of the guidance and counselling services in the schools and other student services within the education directorate. At this stage, students also have to make choices with regard to the subjects they would want to study during their first year in secondary school (School Net, 2010).

At secondary level until September 2011 there were three different kinds of state schools; namely the junior lyceums, area secondary schools and schools for very low achievers. Admission to the state junior lyceums, which were the schools offering a more intensive academic course was controlled by a qualifying entrance examination. Pupils were examined in Maltese, English, mathematics, social studies and religious knowledge (children were exempted from sitting for religious knowledge if parents objected on ground of conscience). Those who failed these examinations were admitted to the area secondary schools. This system is gradually being phased out (Grima and Grech, 2008) and a comprehensive system involving the setting of students according to their ability in individual subjects shall be introduced across Malta as from September 2011. In an informal interview held in 2010, Mr. Anthony De Giovanni, director emeritus of the Department of Further Studies and Adult Education of the Education Directorate, envisaged that the changes in the system will eventually cause problems when students eventually come to terms with the

secondary school leaving certification coupled with the dichotomy of an inclusive system which leads to 'selection' for University. Consequently, there will be lower esteem for the vocational strand, a high rate of early school leavers and a high rate of school leavers without having achieved the key competences. The fact that Secondary Education Certification (SEC) is run by the University of Malta when this directly reflects on its own entrance parameters does not necessarily adequately cover the educational process that is being proposed in compulsory schooling.

"The Option Exercise" is carried out in state schools for students in Form 2 and is held during the 3rd Term in April-May. Talks to students are carried out by the guidance teachers in each school while meetings for parents are carried out by the school counsellors. Students would need to indicate what subjects they had chosen when they were in Year 6 of their primary school to avoid duplicating choices, and then proceed to make three further subject choices. (Ghazla tas-Suggetti Ghat-Tielet Sena – Option Choice for the Third Form: Schoolnet, 2010) Although the Guidance and Counselling Section portray subject choice as a non-determining process with regards to the students' careers, this thesis is able to shed further light on the issue.

In relation to this, Sharf (2002) mentions that at ages seventeen and eighteen in the United States in the last year of high school, decisions as to whether one should go to college, and what to major in, are the real immediate questions. At this stage, adolescents are aware that they need to pay attention to issues such as job availability and they are aware that they might not be able to get into the college or into the career field of their choice. Sharf continues to state that career guidance usually consists of an assessment of their interests, capacities and values. When hearing a student discussing the world of work and their own abilities and desires, counsellors can feel that testing and in-depth counselling may be helpful.

Guidance and counseling in primary and secondary schools in Malta is mainly provided by the Guidance and Counseling Service found within the Directorate of Educational Services. Currently as part of the same reform targeted at the transition from the primary to the secondary sector, these services are now shifting to the area colleges where guidance and counseling services are now more amenable to the student.

Options and subject choice in Malta seem to be still very much dependant on gender, availability in the school and amenability according to which class the student is placed in. With respect to the latter issue this would mean that a student placed in the least academically-achieving class would be probably advised not to take science courses but would be more encouraged to take arts, languages, home economics or textiles and design. Gender issues in Maltese education were extensively researched by Darmanin (1992; 2006) who purports that female participation in the world of work is still low when compared to the decrease in fertility rates. Hantrais (2004: 6) in Darmanin (2006) purports that Malta and Spain are the only countries to combine low labour market integration with acceptance of women as working mothers. The low participation and fertility rates imply that acceptance is limited. Darmanin (1992) states that compared to Maltese boys and their European counterparts, some Maltese girls do achieve well possibly due to a combination of single-sex and selective secondary education. However, it is also true that these same girls continue to have lower and feminized occupational aspirations which mirror the job opportunities in the labour market. Yet others are incapacitated by their schooling and have until recently been channelled into the labour-intensive jobs in which Malta's economy depended in the first phase of industrialisation in the 1960's and 1970's. In fact trade schools for girls as opposed to those for boys were not preparing females for entry into skilled work despite the dearth of skilled labour in the textile and light engineering industries. The absence of state-of-the-art machinery in these schools contributed to the poor

participation of women in the industrial sector and to the depressing of these girls' aspirations. Although trade schools have been abolished and the provision of specialized vocational education is now available at post-secondary level, it seems that career-guidance provision and upgrading of services has failed to keep up and the message in the hidden curriculum still resonates the culture inherent in the 1960's and 1970's. In fact, in this system a "talented" few are promoted whilst the others are cooled out (Darmanin, 1992). Some girls do indeed make it through the selective single-sex system to 'O' and 'A' level success but this always occurs within certain gendered spaces and often only to find few posts of responsibility. In 2001 with the introduction of MCAST, the system is there but the preparation for entry to it seems to be inadequate.

In the seminal work by Ball et al. (2000) the stories of Luke and Jordan show that choice and transition are heavily bounded by contingency and unpredictability. Such seems to be the contingency and unpredictability which is created by the ordinary level exam mechanism at the end of the fifth form and this also seems to heavily influence the choices that Maltese young people make. For Luke and Jordan, results impose an erratic course through post-compulsory education and work markets and these are further accentuated and also further develop the learning identities of these individuals. Jordan (Ball et al., 2000), who failed his 'A' level examinations, found himself a job as a trainee restaurant manager with a contract of part-time attendance at a local college. The outcome of his 'A' level results, which was unpredictable, lead to a change in career trajectory.

Harlen and Deakin Crick (2003) state that testing particularly in high stake contexts has a negative impact on motivation for learning that militates against the preparation for lifelong learning. Motivation is considered as a complex concept closely aligned to the "will to learn" and encompassing self-esteem, self-efficacy, effort, self regulation, locus of control

and goal-orientation. Citing Black and Wiliam (1998:18) Harlen et al. (2003) maintain that summative assessment and the feedback it gives serves to *“teach the weaker pupils that they lack ability, so that they are demotivated and lose confidence in their own capacity to learn.”* The participants of the study reported in this thesis are students who have undergone tests all their lives. Having attended a junior lyceum has made of them somewhat deserving in the testing system as they managed to pass their 11+ exam but the trajectory in their secondary school might not have taken the same course. Chetcuti (2001) also points out to the impact that the differentiated paper system, created by the MATSEC board, has caused on students. She states that the differentiated system forces students to place themselves in a category and the development of their sense of identity is strongly linked to the outcome. Within such a context, this examination system becomes a powerful measure of self-worth resulting in the empowerment of some but in elimination of possibilities for others. Reay (2001:334) in fact points out that:

It is not surprising that education for the working classes has traditionally been about failure; about “being found out”. And this is not just an English phenomenon.

Grima and Ventura (2006) state that the MATSEC board created in 1991 was seen as a key to entering university and this has remained the main aim of the system resulting in the priority given to ‘academic and scholarly knowledge that characterize practically all secondary school subjects. *“....no attempt [was made] to strike a balance between academic and scholarly knowledge....and utilitarian knowledge”* (Ventura and Murphy, 1998:49). The original aim privileged academic subjects and although the idea that SEC should cater for technical subjects had been proposed on various occasions, to this day, this element of exclusivity has not been adequately addressed and may be partly accountable for the selectivity of the system (Grima and Ventura, 2006). Murphy (2011: 71) points out

that the setting up of MATSEC was something “*very brave and courageous*”. He points out that it is the smallest national examination board in the whole world but it needs investment and support and stronger partnerships with other foreign assessment organisations. Murphy (2011) refers to his own report which was issued in 2005 where he had already highlighted that short schooling hours in Malta have a negative effect on youngsters. He also refers to a report issued by the European Commission in 2008 which states that as many as 78% of Maltese fourth and fifth formers attended private lessons. This was having a negative effect on students because it was restricting their leisure time in a way which was “*psychologically and educationally undesirable*.” (2011: 71). Moreover, private tuition cannot be afforded by potentially disadvantaged children and unlike school is completely unregulated. The main cause of such a high attendance to private lessons seems to be the short schooling hours in the system as contrary to what happens in other countries, these remain the same at both primary as well as secondary level. Furthermore, according to Murphy (2011) much of the teaching in Malta seems to be designed to impart factual knowledge whereas in other countries, students are encouraged to develop their own thinking skills. In other countries vocationally oriented subjects have been introduced in order to engage a wider pool of students. In fact, based on my experience as a practitioner at the college, the fact that results from MATSEC exams are used for entry purposes at various entry level points for courses at MCAST does not really provide a good measure of student ability. Most courses at MCAST have a strong practical component and students are not being properly prepared to undertake this kind of learning. Moreover some academically gifted students might drop out from courses at MCAST because of the hefty practical component in most courses. The practical side of learning for them was a complete change from what they were used to in their earlier school days and for which they were totally unprepared. Students who start at MCAST on lower level courses and manage to progress in their studies tend to have a better chance to be successful than those who enter at higher levels. This is because those

who would have followed other courses would already know their way about in the MCAST system, with its own methods of teaching and assessing.

2.2 Post-Compulsory Education

Post-compulsory educational institutes offer courses at various levels. The Junior College offers a pre-university course over two years, whilst the Higher Secondary also offers courses on an academic route for those students who did not achieve the entry requirements for the Junior College. There are also a number of private sixth forms who offer the same educational programme.

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology offers courses from Malta Qualifications Framework Levels 1 to 6 (bachelor's degree) via the Vocational/Technical Route. All Maltese full-time students are entitled to a monthly grant. State and church institutions are state funded. However independent upper secondary institutions charge tuition fees.

2.2.1 The Pre-University Route

There are two main educational institutions which cater for students who want to further their studies via the academic route. The first one is the Junior College and it offers a two-year course specifically designed for future university students, who are prepared for the MATSEC Certificate in accordance with the university's general entry requirements (Junior College Website, 2010). Students may choose from a wide range of subjects and must take two subjects at advanced level, three at intermediate level, as well as systems of knowledge, also at intermediate level. Subjects chosen should also include any special course requirements needed for their prospective university course. While providing formal instruction, the Junior College encourages students to develop their own initiative through

guided self-teaching in preparation for their future University career. A short section on this institution was included because participants in this thesis made reference to the Junior College in that they stated that this was not an option for them owing to various reasons which will be outlined in the analysis chapter.

The second post-secondary school which I will make reference to is the Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School. The higher secondary offers academic courses at ordinary, advanced and intermediate level and students have a variety of options from which they can make up their own individual course of studies depending on the qualifications they attained and the qualifications they need to get to progress in their studies or to start work (Giovanni Curmi, Higher Secondary School Website, 2009). In fact, some of the students seek admission to MCAST to pursue a vocationally, or technically oriented courses, whilst others start working after attending the higher secondary. A considerable number of students also continue their education at the University of Malta. This institution was referred to by the participants of this thesis sometimes in the same way as the Junior College. The specific views expressed will be expanded upon in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

2.2.2 Vocational and Further Education

The year 2001 marked a turning point for the provision of Vocational Education and Training (VET) on the Maltese Islands. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) was set up with the main objectives of incorporating all existing vocational schools and of setting up new ones. The start of MCAST has in fact marked the opening of the Institute of Communications Technology and the incorporation of the Institute of Building and Construction, The Institute of Art and Design, The Institute of Electronics, The Maritime Institute and The Institute of Business and Commerce which were previously separate post-secondary institutions. In 2003, the Institute of Agribusiness (previously the Agricultural

College), the Institute of Community Services (previously Carmen Carbonaro School of Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy, The Prevocational School and Mother Theresa College) and the Institute of Mechanical Engineering (previously known as the Technical Institute) were also incorporated within the structure of the college. Another aim in the setting up of MCAST was that of providing and ensuring quality VET on the Islands through standardisation of qualifications and through the provision of a high profile image. (Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology Website, 2010)

MCAST makes use of foreign board syllabi for some of the courses on offer with the most commonly used being City and Guilds and the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC). Others are the International Therapy Examination Council (ITEC), the *Association of Accounting Technicians* (AAT), the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII) and the Chartered Institute of Bankers (CIB). Although the content of the syllabi is developed in the United Kingdom, these are more often than not flexible in structure to allow for relevance to the Maltese context. Nevertheless, the level is still monitored through the work of external verifiers or quality managers working for the previously mentioned examination bodies. One should also note that these awarding bodies were regularly monitored by the former Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in the United Kingdom. The use and modification of foreign syllabi to the local context is a system that has worked very well because of the small size of the islands that cannot afford to have a structure that requires the effort of individuals equal to local population. However, some of the courses offered are actually developed by MCAST through the requirements that are presented by the industry concerned. In fact MCAST liaises continuously with the Federation of Industry and the Malta Enterprise with regard to the development of new industries on the Maltese Islands. A case in point would be the running and development of five of the latest additions. These are the MCAST BTEC Extended Diploma in Applied Science, the MCAST Diploma for Pharmacy

Technicians, the MCAST Diploma for Dental Surgery Assistants, the MCAST Diploma for Medical Secretaries and the MCAST National Diploma in Aerospace Engineering. Skill and competence development in these areas are needed due to the development of new pertaining necessities on the Maltese Islands.

MCAST courses are offered in a variety of settings and in at least nine different areas of specialisation. For this reason, I will be mainly describing those courses and levels which the interviewees participating in my study are following. The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 1 Courses are normally known as Foundation Courses. These courses do not normally require any Ordinary Level MATSEC passes but if the number of applicants exceeds the number of available places, students are usually invited to undertake an admissions test which might also include an interview as part of the selection process. These foundation courses have undergone extensive revision throughout the years but students who participated in this study, who were enrolled on a foundation course have been through a summative system with a mid-yearly and an annual examination. At UK NVQ Level 2, MCAST offers a number of First Diploma and Certificate Courses. In fact four of the interviewees have been through this level. One has followed the City and Guilds Certificate in Hairdressing which has formative feedback for hairdressing salon skills and final examinations. Two of the interviewees have followed the BTEC First and National Diplomas in Health and Social Care whilst another student has followed the BTEC First and National Diplomas for IT Practitioners. These courses provide a formative type of assessment based on learning outcomes resulting in a number of pass, merit and distinction grading criteria. Another interviewee managed to enrol immediately for the NVQ Level 4 AAT Diploma in Accounting which is a three year course and is exam based.

Students now have the opportunity to follow higher education courses at MCAST where the aim is to provide courses which have not as yet been offered at the University of Malta. The higher national diploma at NVQ Level 5 has been run in a number of MCAST institutes with success. In September 2009 MCAST has started running its first top-up degree courses in agreement with the Fraunhofer Society, a German research organisation with 58 institutes spread throughout Germany, each focusing on different fields of applied science (Fraunhofer – Gesellschaft Consortium Website, 2009).

MCAST also runs a good number of part-time courses in the evenings under the MCAST Gateway to Industry Provision (MG2I). These courses are normally amenable to the general public against a fee.

2.2.2.1 The MCAST Private Training IT Partners

Owing to the increase in student numbers particularly in the field of IT, MCAST has had to resort to a tendering process for the provision for a number of courses by private training partners (PTP) under the direction and complete standardisation procedures for BTEC courses run by MCAST. One of the interviewees attended Key Services (CC Training). Other private training partners were, like Key Services, in operation and these were Swatar Training Centre and Future Focus. These private training partners catered for about 600 students (Bartolo, 2008).

Key Services Ltd. was thus one of the training providers tendered by MCAST in 2008. It is situated in Msida which is in the central part of the Island and about ninety minutes away from the MCAST central campus using a bus. It is primarily an information technology outsourcing firm, offering solutions for managing the IT infrastructure of small and mid-sized businesses. Key Services delivers IT services that aim to increase

productivity through advanced technologies combined with proven methodologies and processes. (Key Services Limited Website, 2010)

2.2.2.2 Apprenticeship Schemes

Apprenticeship schemes witness the apprentice following a training programme at a vocational educational institution and carrying out on-the-job training at a place of work. In Malta they are based on the dual system, namely the Technician Apprenticeship Scheme (TAS) and the Extended Skill Training Scheme (ESTS).

The apprentice, the employer (also known as the sponsor) and the Employment and Training Corporation (Employment and Training Corporation Website, 2010) enter into an agreement laying down the rights and obligations of all parties during the apprenticeship. Apprentices are obliged to attend at a vocational educational institution to acquire the underpinning knowledge (off-the-job training) related to their calling. Public and private sector firms provide the on-the-job training, the latter employing the largest number of apprentices in both schemes.

The aims of the apprenticeship schemes are those of facilitating the students' transitions from school to the workplace and the acquisition of practical experiences in their area of competence. Furthermore employers are in a position to ensure an efficient and qualified workforce and are guaranteed involvement in the national vocational education and training initiatives by training their potential future workers. MCAST is mainly in charge of the theoretical component of those courses which are offered through apprenticeship schemes.

The Maltese vocational education and training (VET) system differentiates between apprenticeships and work-placements. Apprenticeships are regulated by the Employment

and Training Corporation whereas work placements are co-ordinated by the educational institution. The apprenticeship schemes have been criticised by some educationalists because the lecturer cannot visit students on the job for assessments. Therefore more often than not the programme which is carried out at MCAST and the one at the workplace do not follow a common scheme of work. Currently discussion between MCAST and ETC for the revision of apprenticeships is underway (MCAST meeting with ETC 03/09/10).

2.2.2.3 The Marketisation and Improvement of Vocational Education in Malta

In the inception of MCAST, the public at large were bombarded with a campaign of a second-chance opportunity for school leavers without qualifications and also as the driving force behind a radical change in culture (Calleja, 2003; Galea, 2003).

This provided a new opportunity for these youngsters but at the same time, the way in which these courses were structured might have helped them to aim lower than their actual capabilities. Furthermore, the initial scenario as a second chance school has always been a misnomer, because it always offered courses at higher levels, and as from 2009 it offered top-up degree programmes. Students challenged with this confusing information faced two problems. The first problem is the vocational-academic divide which brought about with it a tapering off of continuing education opportunities if the student selected the former. This was due to the fact that the University still to date seems to find it hard to accept MCAST qualifications for entry into most of its degree programmes. The second is the fact that MCAST has been marketed as a second-chance school puts the same label over these students even though they would work hard and eventually attain their qualifications.

Various local surveys have confirmed employers' complaints with regard to skill constraints, especially in lower managerial and technical positions (Triganza Scott and Cassar, 2005: 46). These authors also cite Value (2000) in that Malta has still to struggle and find ways and means to be more competitive. Triganza Scott and Cassar (2005) maintain that MCAST has a vital role to fulfil. It has to put vocational education at par with academic knowledge and also develop a workforce which is able to adapt and to keep up with industrial demands which are continuously changing. These authors state that MCAST should undertake the role of "link" between industry, students and the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC).

2.2.3 The University of Malta

Another institution which was mentioned by the participants in this research is the University of Malta. The University of Malta is totally funded by Government and is autonomous and self-governing. Courses of studies last between one and six years.

The admission requirements to tertiary level education are the University Matriculation Certificate and the Secondary Education Certificate examinations. Corresponding levels of other overseas examinations may be accepted as equivalent. Courses of studies may specify special requirements for admission to that course. The University Admissions Board may also accept graduates of another university or candidates with other qualifications.

The University of Malta offers a number of courses in various faculties leading to a Bachelor's degree at the end of three to four years, depending on the course followed. First-degree course in dental surgery, engineering and architecture and medicine and surgery take five years whilst the course work leading to doctor of law lasts six years. Murphy (2011) for instance, commends the standard of the B. Ed. (Hons.) course and openly conveys his

disappointment at the fact that graduates from this course are looked down upon or unfairly branded when compared to others who follow more traditional courses. He points out that it is a four-year course and that they cover a lot of subject expertise. It is crucial, however that opportunities for further development of these graduates are made available and that their performance on the job is monitored and appraised.

Undergraduate courses at the University are based on a modular or credit system (European Credit Transfer System). Lectures are supplemented by tutorials and, where appropriate, clinical teaching, practical demonstrations and laboratory work. Post-graduate degrees at Master's levels are also offered and require between one and four years of full-time or part-time study through course work and/or research work. Post-graduate doctoral degrees are awarded and are based on research (University of Malta Website, 2010).

2.3 Summary and Conclusion

The first section of this chapter has been dedicated to a brief description of the Maltese scenario. This has then focused on the Maltese education system where the pre-primary, primary, secondary and post-compulsory educational services have been described. It has been pointed out that that in the upper cycle of primary education as well as the secondary sector are undergoing major revision due to a change in focus of the 11+ exam. Although there were other institutions which could have been mentioned in this chapter, I have chosen those which impinge on the understanding of the transitions that the participants underwent in this research. In the next chapter, I will now review literature on transitions and on concepts which, in my opinion, inform the individual nature of these transitions.

Chapter 3

A Literature Review on Transitions

3.0 Introduction

In the preceding chapter we have seen what pathway the Maltese secondary school student encounters when faced with choices and career options by taking a look at the Maltese educational context. In this chapter we will be looking at the ways in which transition has been defined and at other concepts which inform this transitory process.

This review is thus divided into two main parts. The first part deals with literature which focuses upon the individual whilst the latter looks at what goes on in transitions. Klein and Koslowski (2000) maintain that most of the research in organisations is now multilevel in that it captures the essence of experiences in their complexity. I choose to adhere to their argument in the latter part of this chapter where I review the literature on transitions as divided into micro, meso and macro levels. Hence the first part of this review is divided into three different sections: The first section of this review focuses upon the individual and reviews some of the most prominent literature on the self, as well as on personal change and role innovation, perceived status as a learner and worker as well as self-efficacy. The second section refers to curricula, choices and transition education and the way that these impact on the individual student in transition. The final part of this section then focuses on habitus, vocational habitus and communities of practice since they form the framework for explaining how experiences which come in the form of full-time, part-time work as well as work-placements can be part of and also inform transitions.

The second part of this review then focuses on the literature on transitions more directly. As previously stated, this literature has been divided into aspects dealing with transitions at the macro, meso and micro levels. Dawson (1996: xxviii) refers to these levels

in a different manner as individual, group, organisation and society. Klein and Kozlowski (2000) and Grant and Marshak (2008), however, refer to micro, meso and macro levels in research. The micro level refers to what the individual experiences whilst the meso level explores individuals amongst themselves at the interpersonal, group level. At the meso level, interactions depend on the actions and behaviour of the individuals in a localised context. The macro level then focuses on the aggregation of an amalgam of meso-level experiences.

I chose to explore the literature in this manner to exemplify two purposes. The acknowledgement of the existence of these levels in research is important because it serves to distinguish how processes influence each other across the levels. It also serves to highlight that findings based on a sample of individuals should not be used to provide conclusions for what might be going on at the macro level (Klein and Kozlowski, 2000). On the other hand, with reference to the first part of this review, it seems worthwhile to point out that no individual exists in a vacuum and individuals change and build up on experience as they reflect about what is going on around them in their life. Therefore the use of the levels in the second part of this review is there to help us understand, but is in no way intended to undermine the complexity of the transitive experience of these students which is also being explored in this thesis.

In this chapter we also see a circular development as we depart from literature which focuses on the individual in section 3.1.1 and then move on to literature which deals with groups and institutions. This focus is maintained as I deal with transitions at macro and meso levels in the beginning of the second part of this chapter whilst then moving on to the individual (micro level) transitions in the last part of the chapter.

3.1 Literature Supporting Theories and Models on Transition

The first section of this review is in fact based upon the areas which were identified by Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000: 148) in their seminal work entitled “Choice, Pathways and Transitions Post-16”. Ball et al. (2000) postulate that the individual functions in three overlapping arenas of actions and centres of choice namely; family, home and domesticity; work, education and training; and leisure and social life. For this thesis, this model has been a useful point of departure and serves to outline the different facets with which the student contends with. Nevertheless, in this review, I start off with literature which focuses on the psychological aspects of the individual and which reviews some of the most prominent literature on identity development, individualisation and liminality. In the second part of this section, I then mainly refer to the work proposed by Evans (2002: 2007) on agency and bounded agency as well as the distinction between the latter and structured individualisation. The discussion of the literature then moves into what is said about learning identity(ies), social Identity(ies) and (dis-) engagement whilst finally I move on to discussing issues of personal change and/or role innovation.

The first part of this review starts from the central point of this thesis which is the individual student and then shifts onto other relevant areas of the students’ lives. In the first section the focus is on the intrapersonal level as to how the student as an individual changes through this transitive experience.

3.1.1. The Student: The Individual

The individual self as the agent is the key actor which this thesis will be focusing upon. The student as an individual undergoes this experience in transition and locating these phenomena is important to the outcome of this thesis since data collection was carried out entirely on the individual students.

3.1.1.1 Identity Development, Individualisation and Liminality

The individual undergoes a continuous process of identity development. Identity development postulates that the “I” of the self is able to reflect on the objectified sense of the “me” and in so doing it represents social expectations. Thus students decide and make choices based on the ways in which “others” view them. Identity develops as the person manages this sense of self within particular social contexts which in this case would be the school, at home, at work and in other places in the company of friends. The self adopts different roles according to the factors that it is contact with and it adopts multiple persona even during this experience: daughter within the family, friend, apprentice on placement or worker, student and future adult with or without family responsibilities. Jung (1928: 305) defines the persona as *“a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual.”* Moreover, Pollard and Filer (1999) cite Mead (1934) who came up with the concept of symbolic interactionism which focuses on the creation of meaning as people interact together using verbal and non-verbal communication. Billet (2001a: 21) in Hodkinson, Hodkinson, Evans, Kersh, Fuller, Unwin and Senker (2004) states that:

there are relations between human thought and action, and the social world... Accordingly, the relations between the mind and the social world have become the focus for understanding both conceptions of human development and how learning proceeds.

Beck (1992) writes about a linear model of individualisation which occurs through a process of liberation, loss of stability and reintegration. This linear model he divides into two in that it occurs for the life situation (objective) and for consciousness / identity (subjective). He states that very little or nothing at all has been said about the latter as the discussions have limited themselves to the objective side. Individualisation purports that individuals

inside and outside the family become the agents of their livelihood mediated by the market as well of their biographical planning and organisation. In fact the individual is indeed removed from traditional commitments and support relationships but exchanges them for the constraints of existence in the labour market and as a consumer with the standardisations and controls they contain. The place of traditional ties and social forms such as social class and nuclear family is taken by secondary agencies and institutions, which stamp the biography of the individual and make that person dependent upon fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets, contrary to the image of individual control which establishes itself in consciousness. Thus individualisation takes effect precisely under general social conditions which allow an individual autonomous private existence even less than before. Ways in which institutions shape biographies mean that regulations in the educational system “*are directly intermeshed with phases in the biographies of people*” (Beck, 1992:132) and that consequently students at MCAST might be following life trajectories which are being directly influenced by the educational institution itself. Furthermore the key to a livelihood lies in the labour market and suitability for the market demands education. Anyone who is denied access to either of these faces social and material exclusion. Beck (1992) points out that without the proper training the situation is as devastating as with training but without the corresponding jobs. Thus the provision or denial of apprenticeships can become a question of whether young people will enter society or drop out of it.

Individualisation of life situations and processes thus means that biographies become self-reflexive and that socially-prescribed biography is transformed into biography that is self-produced and that continues to be produced. Furthermore in the individualized society the individual must therefore learn to conceive of oneself as the centre of action with respect to one’s own biography, abilities, orientation, relationships and so on. Thus society

must be individually manipulated as a “variable”. What is demanded is a “*vigorous model of action in everyday life*” which puts the ego at the centre allotting and opening opportunities for action to it and permits it to decide, act and arrange with respect to one’s own biography in a meaningful way.

Evans and Heinz (1993) state that the extent to which young people are successful in their long term occupational goals not only depends on their past socialisation in family and school but to a large degree on the way identity formation was linked to challenge and rewarding experience in the passage to employment itself. Evans and Heinz maintain that it makes a big difference whether a young person embarks on this risky voyage in a clearly defined progression of qualifications, based on his/her decisions, or in a diffuse, short-term arrangement which is reactive to immediate job demands.

Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) argue that occupation, status and identity are inextricably interwoven in that we are what we do. Not to work, in many ways, is to become excluded – a non-person. The same authors purport on the other hand that identities may be construed through other avenues such as consumption and fetishes in relation to fashion, style and concern with the body and self but these issues will be discussed later on in the chapter. Students know that the chances for a good job without an education decrease but a damaged learner identity makes education seem like an impossible or unpalatable option. This is reflected in their instability of a choice/decision taken with regard to courses and jobs. Ball et al. (2000: 4) cite Rose (1992) who writes about the “*instrumental autonomy of the enterprising self*.” Rose in Ball et al. (2000:4) maintains that young people constantly reiterate that they do have choices, that luck, hard work and sheer determination are the basis of success: “*A calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and works upon itself in order to better itself*”

Turner (1967) in Bettis (1996) stated that the liminal period is an “inter structural stage” in which individuals or groups gave up one social state but had yet to enter the new, prescribed social state and adopt its accompanying responsibilities and points of view. Turner (1967: 99) in Bettis (1996) thus defines liminality as follows: *“This coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that but both.”* Nevertheless as individuals, the fact that we do not concentrate entirely on our selves as the self also has the potential of reflecting on its surroundings. Thus Bettis (1996:108) combines arguments put forth by both Turner (1967) and Zukin (1991) in that *“Liminality mediates the world of macroeconomic and social changes with the daily lives of the students. It is a synergistic concept in that characteristics of the macro and micro worlds play off each other.”* Furthermore, Bettis (1996) states that liminality explains the shift in societies from industries of production to those of consumption which also reflects a change in the jobs which are available. Bettis also states that images of working class neighbourhoods contending with the effects of deindustrialisation are diffused with images of consumer electronic and the changing nature of work. For Bettis, students appeared to exist in a liminal state, one without a defined status or future in the world of work since their parents’ secure jobs were no longer available to them. Furthermore, the majority of the interviewed students in this study were uncertain about their future lives and that normal peer relations which usually include a social hierarchy were changed (Bettis, 1996: 106).

3.1.1.2 Agency, Bounded Agency and Structured Individualisation

With a background of compulsory education and its experience, literature seems to automatically assume that students experiencing transition are endowed with an internal

decisive energy to shape their future. This can be enhanced or restrained by factors such as learner identity which will be described in section 3.1.1.3.

One of the recent interests in agency stems from recent sociological analyses of modernisation and the transformation of modern societies into late, high or post modern ones (Beck; 1992 and Giddens; 1991). Biesta and Tedder (2006), state that modernisation, understood as the erosion of structuring traditions and frameworks, makes agency increasingly necessary. This finds support in the Maltese Context because of the changing nature of the tertiary education structure particularly for the FE sector.

Agency is a temporally embedded process of social engagement informed by the past (in its “iterational” or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a projective capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a practical-evaluative capacity to contextualize past habits and future moments within the contingencies of the moment.

(Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 962)

Evans (2002) states that the introduction of agency is a relatively new development and it came about as scholars realized that the influence of social structures was neither direct nor deterministic. Life experience for young people was complicated by the fact that they can react and respond to structural influences, that they can make their own decisions with respect to a number of major or minor life experiences and that they can actively shape some important dimensions of their life experiences (Rudd and Evans, 1998).

Evans (2002) states that research and analysis has either emphasised the continuities of deep-seated structural influences or emphasised the discontinuities and changes in young people's lives. Gudmundsson (2000) in Evans (2002) argues that positions tend to be reinforced by the type of methodology chosen, and he calls for greater methodological diversity in grappling with the complexities of the situation of contemporary

youth. In her study published in 2007, Evans proclaims that findings support the notion that highly-structured environments are associated in people's minds with the idea of reduced scope for individual pro-active effort. She maintains that in highly-structured environments, opportunities are open for those following clearly-defined routes. Therefore, it is these same structural opportunities or barriers that are held responsible by individuals for any failure. Findings from the United Kingdom suggest that one consequence of a culture that pushes forth a belief that opportunities are open to all is that people blame themselves for their failures in education and the labour market. On the other hand in the highly-structured western German system, external factors can more easily be held responsible for failure, giving people greater scope to develop a positive sense of self in early adult life. In East Germany, despite placing great weight on external factors that influence an individual's opportunities, young people often ascribed failures to themselves as individuals. This can be attributed to the fact that this generation of youngsters had suddenly to invent new scripts and routines for themselves after the political changes and had to evaluate themselves in relation to western norms and expectations. With their feelings of lack of control and disbelief in equality of opportunities, this group had the most negative view of the future.

Evans (2007) makes reference to Beck (1992) whose work I have already mentioned earlier on in this chapter. She in fact points out that it was German sociologists who developed the idea that a process of individualisation is taking place in society and in people's lives. Beck (1992; 1998) in Evans (2007) outlined the nature of an emergent "risk society" which emphasized the increased uncertainty and unpredictability of the individual's life course. The person learns to "*conceive of him/herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect of his/her own biography*" (Evans, 2007: 135) trying to minimise risk and maximise personal opportunities. Thus factors which were seen as determinants of

many aspects of life in industrialised societies such as class culture and consciousness, gender and family roles were dismantled by the process of individualisation. This approach was endorsed by Giddens (1991; 1998). Other theorists such as Furlong and Cartmel (1997) and Engel and Strausser (1998) maintain that such an approach to individualisation only serves to disorient or mislead. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) state that the social world has only come to be regarded as unpredictable and filled with risks that can only be negotiated on an individual level, whereas in fact, structural forces operate as powerfully as ever and the chains of human interdependence remain intact.

Of particular usefulness at this point is to take a look at the way in which Evans (2007) has located theoretical relationships concerning agency and structure. She posits that these can be located in relation to three dimensions of which the second seems to be the most pertinent to this thesis. The first dimension is that of social determinism versus individualisation and reflexivity in social biographies. As already mentioned, the start of individualisation is attributed to Beck (1992; 1998) and its manifestation in the uncertain life situations of people. Baethge (1989) in Evans (2007) took this thesis further by applying it to the situation of youth in industrialized societies and the structural disintegration of social classes or strata into individualized subgroups, accompanied by the formation of individualistic identities at the expense of collective identity. Ziehe's (1996, cited by Evans, 2007) concept of "makeability" with its emphasis on internal control, struggling with the effects of social forces is placed higher on the structure-agency dimension. The second dimension according to Evans (2007) emphasises the internal versus the external control processes. Researchers who have worked on efficacy namely Bandura (1997), Elder (1995), Flammer (1997), Heckhausen and Schulz (1995) and Rothbaum, Weisz and Snyder (1982) have emphasised internal processes of the "acting individual" in relation to the external environment. This dimension posits that there are limitations to personal control on

all domains of life and some aspects of environment and personal circumstances are extremely difficult to change. Others, however, can be overcome by the exercise of initiative and learning. Bandura (1997: 3) makes direct reference to the nature of human agency and he states that *“beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the key factor of human agency. If people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen.”* He also states that *“agency refers to acts done intentionally.”* Bandura purports that human adaptation and change are rooted in social systems. Therefore personal agency operates within a broad network of socio-structural influence. In agentic transactions, people are both producers and products of social systems. Social structures which are devised to organize, guide, and regulate human affairs in given domains by authorized rules and sanctions are created by human activity. Social structures in turn impose constraints and provide resources for personal development and everyday functioning. However, neither structural constraints nor enabling resources pre-establish what individuals become and do in given situations. Giddens (1984) states that for most part, social structures represent authorised social practices carried out by human beings occupying designated roles. Thus within the rule structure, there is a lot of personal variation in their interpretation, enforcement, adoption, circumvention or active opposition (Burns and Dietz, in press in Bandura, 1997). Efficacious people are quick to take advantage of opportunity structures and figure out ways to circumvent institutional constraints or change them by collective action. Conversely inefficacious people are less apt to exploit the enabling opportunities provided by the social system and are easily discouraged by institutional impediments. It is not a dichotomy between a disembodied social structure and a decontextualised personal agency, but a dynamic interplay between individuals and those who preside over the institutionalised operations of social systems. This interplay involves agentic transactions between institutional functionaries and those who seek to accommodate to or change their practices.

The third dimension focuses on social reproduction or conversion thus exploring the degree to which social mobility and transformation can be attributed to individual and collective scope for action. Goldthorpe (1998) and other rational choice theorists had originally emphasised the overriding importance of analysing the conditions under which actors come to act, from the sociological perspective. Bourdieu's (1993) emphasis on social reproduction is high but he emphasises subjectivities of the acting individual and explores agency in relation to "habitus" and "field". Work by Bourdieu deemed relevant to this thesis will be explored in greater depth later on in this review.

Evans (2002) suggests that evidence indicates that agency operates in differentiated and complex ways in relation to the individual's subjectively perceived frames for action and decision. Thus a person has boundaries and limits which can alter with time but which have structural foundations in relation to gender and social/educational inheritance, in acquired characteristics of education and qualification and in the segments of the labour market into which these lead. Thus Evans supports the notion that a "structured individualisation" process in the experience, values and behaviour of young people is evident. However, Evans (2002) points out that the focus in structured individualisation is back onto the operation of structures rather than understanding agency or the agency-structure interfusion. The notion of interfusion is further described by Evans (2002: 264) as *"examining the possibility that the flows of influence are multiple sometimes mutually reinforcing and reciprocal."* Evans further exemplifies this by mentioning that ambitious goals and endeavours are likely to appeal to young people who have strong control beliefs and not to those lacking self-confidence and progress in working toward goals of this kind tends to further enhance a sense of personal agency. Furthermore, social relationships also structure experience and merge with personal constraints in a multitude of ways while

external influences and constraints result into modes of agency through a process of internalisation.

The exploration of individualisation requires a better understanding of social regularities and individual differences in the agency of individuals. Elder (1995) in Evans (2007) observed that all social transitions entail risk of losing personal control with effects dependant on biography and on material and social situations. In Evans (2001) the apparent differences in orientations to “life project planning” may in fact be explained in part by interactions between the generations, and the extent to which parents are able to secure the prospect of 'better lives and opportunities' for their children. The changing but bounded aspirations and expressions of agency may also be explained by socio-cultural influences experienced in their peer groups and institutional settings, as well as by the unforeseen events inherent in life transitions. Nevertheless, the concept of bounded agency depicted by Evans (2007: 17) sees *“actors as having a past and imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present, together with subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate, the social landscapes which affect how they act”*. Bounded agency is thus socially situated and influenced but not determined by environments. Bounded agency emphasizes internalized frames of reference as well as external actions. Evans (2007) maintains that by examining bounded agency, the focus moves from structured individualisation onto individuals as actors without losing the perspective of structuration.

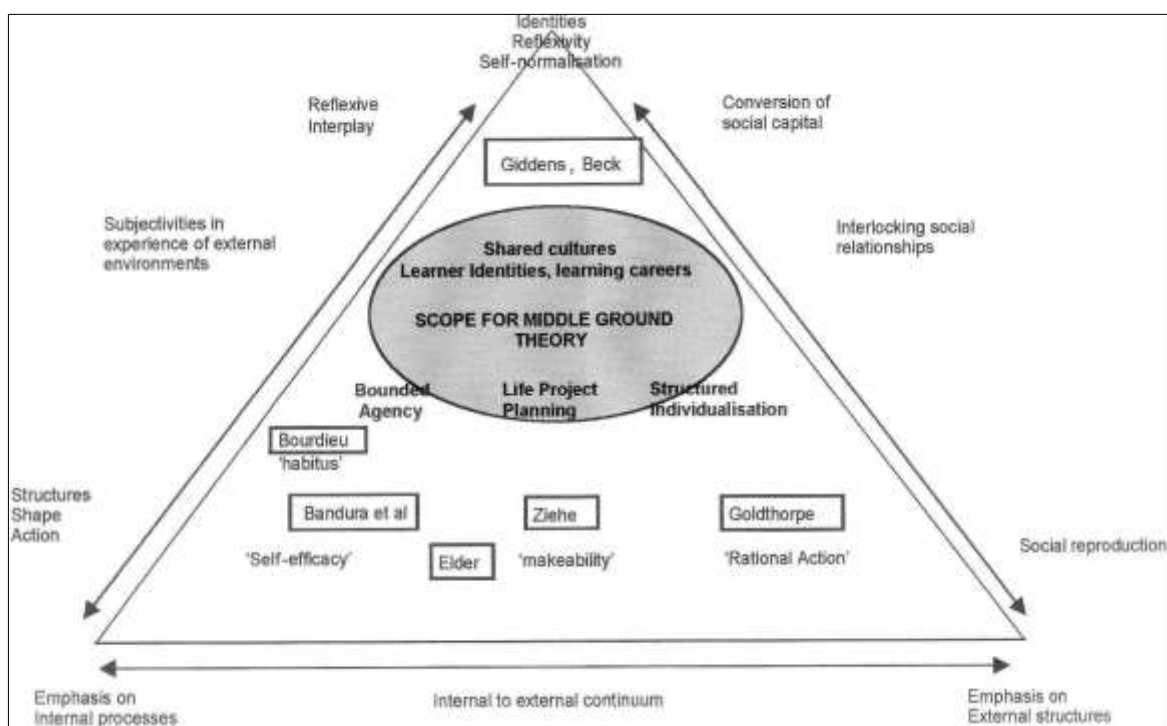


Figure 3.1: Locating Bounded Agency in Middle Range Theory
Source: Figure 5 in Evans, K (2002)

3.1.1.3 Learning Identity(ies), Social Identity(ies) and (dis-) engagement

The title of this subsection calls for the use of both singular and plural of “identity”. It seems to me very unrealistic to see this as one whole. First of all individuals assume multiple roles in multiple contexts each of which must have its own learning identity. Even at school and in different subjects individuals can have different learning identities also assumed with different teachers who facilitate the construction of different learning environments. This is similar to the concept of different persona as defined by Jung (1928) which is described in section 3.1.1.1.

Rees et al. (1997) in Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) talk about the exhaustion of learning identity. Using the case of Debra as an example they show how sources of positive identity are unavailable at school and maintain that she has every right to want to escape

from it. Schooling as experienced by Debra may simply confirm an estranged or at worst a damaged learner identity (Ball et al., 2000). Debra's withdrawal is maybe one way of repairing her identity and self esteem which has been damaged by her experiences at school with its hidden examples of student inferiority. Debra is doubly stigmatized both by her teachers and by the students and she relates that she was called names, found the work very hard and was not helped by the teachers. It is not surprising that Debra stated that school was not doing much for her in that both socially because of the students and academically because of the teachers, she was an outsider.

In their work on early school leavers and disengagement, Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, Rummens, Cote and Roth-Edney (2005) assert that the process of disengagement from school commenced prior to the actual physical departure. These authors state that the literature on disengagement demonstrates that the process should be seen as multi-dimensional, long term, and crossing over macro, meso and micro risk factors. This study shows that disengagement had different starting points, faltering points, and end points. The three most common starting points were characterized as: "starting from scratch"; "mostly protected"; and the "in-between". Early school leavers who were placed in the "starting from scratch" category are young people who were starting from scratch and who had multiple risk factors at all levels, namely within the family, in the community, and at school. Schooling for these young people posed a further risk in an already difficult pathway. The second category emerging from the work by Ferguson et al. (2005) is for those students whom they deemed to be "mostly protected". These young people who were "mostly protected" experienced numerous protective factors in their families, communities, schools and within themselves. For instance, they could be coming from caring homes with educational advantages and have been enjoying school before leaving. They often had plans to negotiate their way back in, or were in process of doing so. The third and final

category which is stipulated by Ferguson et al. (2005) are the “in-between”. The young people who were “in-between” experienced both risk and protective factors at micro, meso and macro levels and had numerous challenges, but also distinct possibilities for success as evidenced in the protective factors surrounding them. In this case, a poor start at home could be met with a caring educational environment and outreach. Hence, disengagement can best be defined in the following terms:

A process and/or pathway (often non-linear) toward adult status; Inter-relational rather than individual; Contingent on promises (kept or broken) between people; Multi-dimensional across micro, meso and macro levels and described as entailing a complex, often emotional, decision to leave school on the part of the student and/or disconnection by the school system.

(Ferguson et al., 2005: 19)

Young people’s accounts of becoming disengaged with school were partial, fragmented and could be defined as non-linear. They described their experiences in a manner which went forwards and backwards in time where the past, present and even the future were inextricably intertwined in the retelling of their experiences. To them, the issue of “dropping out” was not a simple construction but a conglomeration of “*contradiction, struggle, complexity, multiple tensions and subversive forces*” (Ferguson et al., 2005: 19). The finding of numerous instances of inter-relational text in the transcripts indicated that risk and protective factors often functioned simultaneously, or were multiple. An example of this is the way that they talked about their teachers since many youth suggested that they like some teachers very much, but that other teachers led them to disengage from school. Engagement in school was seen as a promise made between various sub-systems namely the school system, the community, the students themselves, and the family.

Kelly (2009) concludes that student disengagement emphasizes the role of collective action amongst peer groups. Disengagement is greatly exacerbated when pro-school behaviour is sanctioned among peers. This can be understood as a social identity theory of student engagement which posits the development and support of an anti-school value system in order to cope with low academic status. Group behaviour which aims at undermining engagement and success in school, is a form of social creativity, a type of action that groups take together in order to maintain a positive social identity. Kelly (2009) also points out that low-academic status is also likely to be sufficient to decrease student engagement even if no collective action is present.

Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) in fact argue that work and education may play different roles in people's lives. Two examples from their set of case studies exemplify their argument. For Rena who is a member of a Gujarati Asian family with strong traditions, education and work are strong escape routes in that they are ways of eluding or postponing fixed and family or communal commitments. Her interests and commitments threaten her family affiliations and offer an arena of experimentation which can even be considered dangerous. On the other hand Delisha is "hemmed in" by education and work because they draw her into a conventional pathway which is somehow very similar to her family's lifestyle, behaviour and aspirations. Education and work in this case also offer a safety arena. However, she has little interest for her peers or the lifestyles of her family. For these two young women, the formation of their identity is troubled and laboured because they have not found learning contexts or identities with which they are totally comfortable.

3.1.1.4 Personal Change and/or Role Innovation?

Role theory assumes that individuals making important transitions relatively show more change in person characteristics than people who do not make such transitions. (O'

Brien, 1986 in van der Felde, Feij and Taris, 1995). This theory also assumes that the effect of the transition will depend on the degree of continuity between the roles a person experiences before and after the transition. Van der Felde et al. (1995) examined the effects of the transition from school to work on different elements of personality and found significant differences in neuroticism, depression, role compatibility, work centrality, boredom susceptibility and spare time. Individuals who transited from school to work were significantly less susceptible to boredom (although they just made a change), were less depressive, had a lower score on neuroticism and had more self-esteem. This may be attributed to the fact that these young adults become economically and psychologically independent by working. The authors state that these results have supported the work of Tiggemann and Winefield (1989) whom they cite.

Smith (1983) states that the phrase “personal change” has, so far, been used in an undefined manner. Theoretical foundations of personal change originate from theories related to psychoanalysis and developmental psychology. One of these is Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) proposed by Kelly (1955) which is a clinically-based theory useful for working with clients in psychotherapy. Viney (1992) states that PCP provides a theory of change rather than of development. Constructs change over the life span not only because of age-related tasks, but because different age cohorts are used as reference points by people when they construe their own action (Neugarten, 1977). Viney (1992) poses the question of whether adults are actually in the position of seeing themselves changing. Martini and Dion (2001) state that participants in their research see their own personal characteristics as evolving across time. Fournier (1996) on the other hand explains that according to PCP (Kelly, 1955), the world does not reveal itself to us, rather, we construe it. Thus PCP interprets the individual as fully in control and wholly agentic. People develop their own set of constructs to help them make sense of the world and of

themselves. Consequently, two individuals are likely to develop different constructions of the same event. Moreover, since change takes place from within the existing construction system, it is likely to follow different directions for different individuals. Although Kelly (1955) suggests that we engage in a continual process of constructive revision, he also accounts for our failure to change. Two factors are said to limit change, namely; the tightness of our construction system and threat. People experience threat when they feel that their core values and identity are challenged or in other words when they feel they are expected or required to become somebody they do not want to become. Furthermore, Personal Construct Psychology proposes the concept of fragmentation. This suggests that change is not necessarily about developing “better” all embracing and logical constructions. On the contrary, individuals may develop a series of subsystems, inherently incompatible with each other. Change may therefore take place by developing contradictory ways of seeing the world in different contexts or context-specific sets of constructions.

Ashforth (2001) states that personal change is also known as accommodation, assimilation (Nicholson, 1987) and personal development. Ashforth makes a distinction between personal change and role innovation. Personal change involves “reactive change in the individual, ranging from minor alterations in daily routines and habits, to major developments in relationships and self-image” (Nicholson and West, 1988: 105). Whereas Role innovation entails adapting the role to fit oneself, personal change entails adapting oneself to fit the role. Nevertheless, research has shown that role innovation and personal change are only weakly correlated (Ashforth and Saks, 1996) rather than negatively correlated. Thus it seems that these concepts are *“independent but not mutually exclusive dimensions”* (Nicholson, 1984). Nicholson (1984) also proposes four adjustment strategies which depend on levels of role innovation and personal change. The first is “replication” where there is the need for low role innovation and low personal development. Replication

represents those transitions that generate minimal adjustment to personal or role systems. The second adjustment strategy is “absorption”. Absorption represents transitions in which the burden of adjustment is borne almost exclusively by the person requiring low role development and high personal development. The third strategy is “determination” which represents those instances in which the individual’s adjustment to the demands of transition leaves the person relatively unaffected but alters the new role requiring high role development and low personal development. The final strategy is “exploration” which represents cases in which there is simultaneous change in personal qualities and role parameters.

Munton and West (1995) state that greater personal change was reported by those moving into newly created jobs perceived as high in job novelty than for newly-created jobs perceived as lower in job novelty. However Ashforth and Saks (1996) point out that novelty is associated to personal change only under some conditions. In some cases a negative correlation between job novelty and personal change has been reported (Black and Ashford, 1995). Munton and West (1995) report that those with less positive self esteem are more likely to report that they adapt themselves to fit their new environment. Mackenzie Davey and Arnold (2000) suggest that social identity theory predicts that too much novelty may be a threat to self-esteem and may lead to defensive rigidity. Erikson (1980: 101) in fact points out that the counterpart of intimacy in adulthood is distantiation, *“the readiness to repudiate, to isolate, and if necessary, to destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one’s own”*. A study by Black and Ashforth (1995) seems to support this. On the other hand, results from models of work-role transitions indicate that a high role novelty is likely to lead to personal change (Nicholson, 1984).

In their work on graduates, Arnold and Nicholson (1991) cast doubt on whether organisational socialisation affects people in the same way(s). This work seems to support other suggestions by Van Maanen and Schein (1979) in that they propose that shifts (changes) may result in only minor or insignificant changes in a person's organisational and personal identity. Fournier (1996) supports the individuality of the personal construct systems. Changes it seems will differ both qualitatively and quantitatively between people.

3.1.1.5 What are the Facets of the Individual Student?

This section has been dedicated to the student as the individual and in so doing it has looked at theories on identity development, individualisation, various concepts focusing on the self and liminality as well as ways in which these facets might change. Although the focus has been as much as possible on the individual, it has been difficult to leave the rest of the world out of the picture. Identity develops from the approval or otherwise of society and authors (Rose, 1992; Beck, 1992; Bettis; 1996) are drawing our attention to the fact that the self is now behaving in different ways owing to the changes arising in today's society. Such a premise is also viewed in the way in which theories about agency have been further developed and discussed by Evans (2002: 2007). In fact, Evans (2007) argues that individuals are agentic in behaviour but this agency is influenced both by the environment as well as the individual's internal structures. Another part of this section has focused on learning identities and the way that these may be encouraged or damaged as well as on the development of social identities and their impact on student dis-(engagement). This further endorses what seems to be the underlying theme in the literature in that the individual is always adapting to and informing him/herself from the environment as to what goes on for the individual when one looks into the extent of personal change or role innovation that one undergoes in transitions towards the world of work.

3.1.2 Curricula, Choices and Educating for Transition

Much has been written about school-to-work transition (Spiteri, 2007; Goodwin and O' Connor, 2005; Ryan, 2001); or about life transitions in a general way (Golan, 1981). In New Zealand (Sultana, 1989) students viewed transition programmes as job-getting agencies since they saw such programmes as an opportunity to get out of mainstream schooling and to get a job. Furthermore, teachers targeted their transition programmes at those believed to be 'at risk' namely those who were non-academic, problem students who were believed to lack cultural and cognitive skills to survive the world beyond school. Such is reflected also in the myriad of literature found on the preparation for transition of students with disabilities. Wyn (2006) speaks about transitions to work and further education in a concurrent manner as part of a life-patterns study; a study of young Australians who completed their final year of compulsory schooling in 1991. The project has recorded the ways in which these young people have responded to their changing world and of necessity are actively and positively developing their own strategies to survive these circumstances.

Socialisation here plays an important part and it is believed that school is responsible for socializing children into the normative requirements, values, behaviours and dispositions of the world of work (Sultana, 2003). What the hidden curriculum presents with regard to how actual subject content is delivered to students is said to impinge upon choices.

In Australia, broad but nevertheless consistent conclusions have been reached in that students are poorly prepared by their schools for the work roles which they will enter. In particular, students need to know more about the careers which are available to them and about opportunities in post-secondary education (Anderson, 1997). Students themselves want a curriculum which is more vocationally relevant and were found to lack the skills and

attitudes which would make them of immediate use to employers. It could be possible that most teachers have never left school themselves and have no clue what working outside a school could be like. This also seems to be the case in Malta where Sultana (2003) points out that the Maltese system lacks clear policy guidelines, an executive arm to implement such a policy, input from voluntary and non-profit organisations for initiatives in the occupational guidance field, pre-service and in-service training for guidance staff, updated and well-documented occupational information and training, cross-sectoral collaboration and services for employed adults seeking career moves. Transition education was created as a response to youth unemployment in various countries (Sultana, 1989) and this was seen to lessen unemployment rates by retaining youth at school for a longer time period. This seems to serve the interest of a state in crisis as it is much easier to address youth and education and blame them for the crisis rather than look at the sources and try to address the economy. (*ibid.*)

A document by Debono, Camilleri, Galea and Gravina issued in 2007 entitled “Career Guidance Policy for Schools” points to the inclusion of career education within the personal and social development curriculum. Although this can be considered to be an improvement, the fact as to whether there will actually be education for transition per se remains unspecified. This is not the international situation where as early as 1989, Sultana points to transition education programmes with a set-up of transition teachers in New Zealand. The analysis of the transition education programme at hand categorizes messages into “intended”, “actual” and “received” thus undermining the legitimacy of the given curriculum in such a programme. Of particular relevance to this study is what Eisner (1985) in Sultana (1989) refers to as “null curriculum” where silence is pregnant with meanings. This is a point for reflection with reference to the way in which teaching staff at the Junior Lyceum which the students attended were behaving. Most were not inclined to expose the

students to MCAST in general and were not happy or proud that their ex-students were following a course at MCAST with success (Spiteri and De Giovanni, 2009). The null curriculum is what is left out or is obscured from the learning process and it must not be confused with the implicit curriculum. The latter can be defined as the non-tangible messages that come across with the explicit curriculum such as for example a teacher who expects the class to stand up and say good morning on entering the classroom. The explicit curriculum is that students are prepared by teaching them the syllabi required to sit for MATSEC exams whilst the implicit curriculum is that being a student attending the Junior Lyceum makes the individual the best candidate to sit for these exams which must lead to the Junior College or to a comparable sixth form and to no other tertiary institution save the University of Malta. Therefore the explicit curriculum is that which is written on paper whilst the implicit curriculum refers to values and skills which accompany the explicit curriculum but are not formally stipulated.

Sultana (1989) points to the work by Bowles and Gintis (1976) where the significance of the overt as opposed to the hidden curriculum of schooling in securing social reproduction and legitimation of inequality. Cassar (2009) in fact points out that in Malta, as in other countries, the hidden curriculum is a tangible reality. Cassar refers to a study carried out by Mifsud (1997) who researched a particular private school. In this study Mifsud states: *“rituals, symbols and everyday interactions construct the particular ethos...in such a way that students become enveloped in a miasma of almost subliminal messages which take in a common-sense, ‘natural’ quality that is difficult to contest.”* (Mifsud, 1997: 349). Cassar continues to assert that the hidden curriculum will be found in schools in a variety of forms and in different levels of intensity but it is rarely absent. Relationships developed between teachers, administrators and students; correspond to the relationships, which are then developed in the workplace. Furthermore the fragmentation of the learning process,

the students' lack of control over their own work and the extrinsic motivation via grades all reflect the capitalist productive process. Much is then to be said about the effects that streaming has on this motivational process with its recreation of the social structure. Kelly (2009) in fact posits that stratified learning environments themselves create problems of engagement among low-achieving students.

Harris and Rosenthal (1990) state that research on teacher expectancy effects might impinge on a large number of students adversely, particularly those of lower social classes and in minor ethnic groups. Rosenthal (1973a; 1973b) points to the warmer climate that teachers tend to create for higher-expectancy students; warmth that can be both verbal and non-verbal. Teachers are more inclined to give differentiated feedback to their special, high-expectancy students. Teachers would also attempt to give more material to their students and would also give more opportunity for their high expectancy student to produce output.

3.1.2.1 Where will I go from here?

Ball et al. (2000) talk about attributive judgements that students give to colleges prior to entry. This is what I call part of the anticipatory transition process where one is basing decisions upon his/her own perceptions based on information heard through the grapevine or through the media. Amma found herself to be an outsider because *"no-one really wants to learn if you know what I mean. And everyone has got this kind of attitude with them. This is what I did not want to get into.....And sometimes I don't know if I'll last."* (Ball et al., 2000; 27). Bank and Porsche (2009) refer to pre-vocational literacy which seems to be a more formal and acknowledged way of looking at this preparation period. They maintain that pre-vocational literacy is a complex construct and that it is made up of five categories, namely; basic school knowledge, psychological characteristics, physical characteristics, psychological traits in working habits and personality, and adolescent vocational maturity.

Although an electronic search yielded no studies on the perceptions of Maltese students on different tertiary educational establishments, the basic process of deliberation of choice may be drawn from the work of Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996) who, speaking about parents, attribute four key qualities belonging to privileged/skilled school choosers. I believe that these skills could also be applied to the students themselves. First amongst these qualities, is the inclination to choice which encompasses the idea and worth of having a choice between schools. The second quality denotes a marked capacity to engage with and utilize the possibilities of choice. These choosers are able to “decode” school systems and organisation, to discriminate between schools in terms of policies and practices, to engage with and question teachers and school managers, to critically evaluate teachers’ responses, scan and interpret various sources of information while in respect of all of this manage to keep aloof and to critically evaluate the meaning and value of impressions and information. Third, choosing a school results as a confusing and complex process because of the unclear and contradictory school principles, of diverse aspirations, desires and concerns related to careers and futures and multiple courses of impression and perception. The more possibilities, the more confusing the choice is. *“We have a vast choice, we’re very lucky. I think it just clouds the issue, if you have too much choice, you just get confused.”* (Ball et al., 1996: 94). These choosers end up with a compromise decision or are left with a degree of equivocation or ambivalence about their choice. Fourth, privileged/skilled choosers in common with other choosers:

....identified their impressionistic, affective, personal responses to schools, derived from visits or open evenings, as often providing the clinching factor in arriving at a final choice, or eliminating a final alternative. The role of the affective, of ethos, atmosphere, ‘feel’, impression, sense, climate is absolutely fundamental to choice.
(Ball et al., 1996: 94)

The other two types of school choosers according to Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996) are defined as “Newcomers” and “Disconnected”. Newcomers have a strong inclination but limited capacity to engage with the market as their *“cultural capital in is the wrong currency”* (Ball et al., 1996: 94). Their biographies and family histories have not provided them with the experiences or inside knowledge of the school system and the social contacts and cultural skills to pursue their inclination to choice “effectively”. This does not mean that they are incompetent but they have much less social competence and capability of seeing of the privileged, they are attentive to gossip, rumour and media operating in the schools and often have strong views based on their own experiences at school. However, they are not at ease with their choice and speak about potential school choices at outsiders. On the other hand, Ball et al. (1996) state that the disconnected type seem to perform their choices out of necessity. They are constrained by programmes of perception which rest on a basic unfamiliarity with particular aspects of schools and schooling. Usually they would have left school early and would have little confidence in their ability to understand or interpret the language of teachers. They are usually impressed by the plant and facilities of schools and are captured by infrastructure. Happiness for them is linked to social adjustment, friendship and engagement with the local community rather than an achievement of long term goals or the realisation of specific talents.

This section has taken a look at different types of curricula and teaching climates, at the different types of school choosers and also at attempts to educate youth for transition. The potential effect of each on transitions has been discussed. In the next section, I will now discuss habitus, vocational habitus and communities of practice.

3.1.3 Habitus, Horizons for Action, Vocational Habitus and Communities of Practice

Concepts of structure, habitus and most importantly vocational structure and communities of practice will help explain the role of work in the transitory experience of students. This is important because some students who are in FE usually have a timetabled slot each week known as “day-release” to attend a placement or usually have part-time work commitments. Thus their week is fragmented between time spent as full-time students and others as full-time workers without actually having the privileges of full-time employment such as pay. Two of the participants of the study have transited into full-time work with some on-the-job training. Other students are released for three to four weeks at a stretch while in some instances, students are released for three months.

On comparing full-time workers to students on day-release, one could immediately foresee that FE students have to contend with multiple learning environments as some work placements are also changed throughout the year. The transition of the individual who chooses a full-time occupation straight after completing compulsory education might be more rapid, intense and less gradual. It is with these notions in mind that concepts of structure, habitus, vocational habitus and communities of practice will be reviewed in this section.

No researcher has seriously doubted that social structures such as ethnicity, gender and occupation or socioeconomic status have a significant impact on the life chances and life experiences of young adults (Evans, 2002). Such a premise derives from the work of Bourdieu (1977; 1990). Wacquant (2006) states that four notations can help us gain a preliminary feel for Bourdieu’s distinctive intellectual project and style. Firstly his conception of social action, structure, and knowledge is resolutely monist or anti-dualistic since it strives to evade or dissolve the oppositions that have defined perennial lines of debate in the social sciences; between subjectivist and objectivist modes of theorizing, between the material

and symbolic dimensions of social life as well as between interpretation and explanation, synchrony and diachrony and micro and macro levels of analysis. Secondly Bourdieu's scientific thought and practice are genuinely synthetic in that they stand at the confluence of academic streams previously thought as discordant or incompatible. Thirdly for Bourdieu, society is fundamentally "agonistic" in that it is a site of endless and pitiless competition and struggle not mere reproduction. This is at the core of Bourdieu's thought. Finally, his work is not about a utilitarian theory of social action in which individuals consciously strategize to accumulate wealth, status or power but a thirst of dignity, which society alone can quench. Only by being granted a name, a place, a function, within a group or an institution, can the individual hope to escape the contingency, finitude and ultimate absurdity of existence (Wacquant, 2006).

Grenfell and James (1998) state that in Bourdieu's theory of practice, human action is constituted through a dialectical relationship between individual's thought and activity and the objective world further represented by "habitus" and "field" respectively.

...objects of knowledge are constructed and not passively recorded, and.... that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the habitus, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions.

(Bourdieu, 1990: 52)

Structure is still at the heart of the concept. Structure mediates between objectivity and subjectivity and is thus the lens with which each individual approaches life in general. Structures thus remain the final unit of analysis. This is not structure in the traditional structuralist intent of uncovering transcultural patterns, but structure as a dynamic cause and effect; as a structured structure and as a structuring structure (Grenfell and James, 1998). Individuals are thus construing their structure and at the same time structuring it with

its framework made up of from the learning institution, work establishment, social network and leisure activities.

The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism, in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the correctness of practices, and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms. This system of dispositions – a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices, an internal law through which the law of external necessities, irreducible to immediate constraints, is constantly exerted – is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism sees in social practices without being able to account for it; and also of the regulated transformations that cannot be explained either by the extrinsic, instantaneous determinisms of mechanistic sociologism, or by the purely internal but equally instantaneous determination of spontaneist subjectivism.

(Bourdieu, 1990: 54)

Grenfell and James (1998) state that habitus has implications not only for understanding educational practice but the practical activity of research into it. They cite Bourdieu as follows:

The habitus acquired in the family underlines the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specifically pedagogic message), and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences (eg. The reception and assimilation of the message of the culture industry or work experiences) and so on, from restructuring to restructuring.

(Bourdieu in Grenfell and James, 1998: 15)

For Bourdieu, individual aspects of habitus lie in individual consciousnesses and unconsciousnesses and their effect of these in and through human practice is actualized in an objectively defined field. Thus field is the objective aspect in that it is a structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level.

James and Grenfell (1998) state that Bourdieu has referred to the relationship between field and habitus as one of “ontological simplicity”. Field and habitus are also mutually constituting:-

The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On the one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of immanent necessity of a field (or of a hierarchically intersecting sets of fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and with value, in which it is worth investing one's practice.

(Bourdieu in James and Grenfell, 1998: 16)

Nash (1990) mentions that the concept of habitus has a threefold reference to Bourdieu's work. It is thus possible to refer to “collective habitus” which is the unifying cultural code, the “dispositional habitus” or the internalised cultural code and “manifest habitus”, which is the practice of a characteristic style. Nash (1990) maintains that this multiple reference does a great deal to effect the mediation between structure and agency. In fact the habitus is also the location of strategic practices for it is not the agents, individuals or social organisations that carry out strategic plans but the habitus which is the embodied objectification of structure.

Nash (1990) also states that Bourdieu maintains that schooling has its own power to shape consciousness, over and above the power of the family, and it is clear that the role of the school is acknowledged as active, and not merely passive in its legitimation of family-acquired habitus. In Bourdieu's theory, the school's failure is located in its structured refusal to develop a “universal pedagogy”. This implies a pedagogy that takes nothing for granted and which is able to succeed with relatively unprepared working class pupils. Bourdieu's theory suggests that the school will generally ignore the habitus of children of non-dominant

classes and this mechanism is indeed the primary cause of the low attainment of working class students. Reactions by teachers to forms of negative withdrawal by working class children will serve to instigate isolation, transformation and eradication of such a culture of resistance.

James and Grenfell (1998) indicate that Bourdieu's work met harsh criticism for his overly mechanistic notions of power and domination well as an excessively determined view of human agency. They also cite Nash (1990) and his critique with respect to habitus. Behind the notion of habitus is an inadequately precise concept of structure, in that a wide variety of social arrangements can count as "structure", from small regularities to massive institutions. The concept is indeed useful in mediating agency and structure in various ways but it has lacunae if it is to be used as a theory of socialisation since it excludes ideas like "self", "choice" and "action", by virtue of its emphasis on practices arising from the group's relation to culture. This problem is further endorsed by the fact that Bourdieu suggests that people are only rational when they step out of the automatic responses prompted by their habitus.

Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) state that the career decisions of the young people they interviewed can only be understood in terms of their own life histories since habitus had evolved through interaction with significant others within the social structure and culture in which the subject has lived and is living. In their work, culture is used *"to describe the socially constructed and historically derived common base of knowledge, values and norms for action that people grow into and come to take as a natural way of life"* (Hodkinson et al., 1996: 148). These authors cite Clarke et al. (1981: 52-53) since they claim that *"culture includes the maps of meanings which makes things intelligible to its members.... Culture is the way the social relations of a group are structured and*

shaped; but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted.”

Hodkinson et al. (1996) use habitus in a similar way although they claim to prefer to use “horizons for action” instead of “maps of meanings”.

In the development of their argument, Hodkinson et al. (1996) also cite Giddens (1984: 1991) by making use of the concepts of “discursive consciousness” and “practical consciousness”. In “discursive consciousness” reasons can be expressed and discussed with others whereas “practical consciousness” occurs when we know something without being able to explain it. Hodkinson et al. (1996) maintain that some choices of lifestyle which includes a working career are not conscious discursive choices in the way in which choice is often understood in everyday language. The self changes reflexively as lifestyle choices are made. The actions of one individual are in a reflexive relationship with the culture and society within which that person lives so that change in culture affects the individual and a change in an individual contributes to change or continuity in the culture. Thus the habitus of an individual acts as the means through which the lifestyle is pragmatically chosen and it modifies as the lifestyle develops. Lifestyle and habitus are inseparably interrelated and one is the manifestation of the other. They evolve, partly through choice and partly through changing circumstances as life progresses. They are constrained and enabled by the social and cultural conditions within which a person live, which are in turn, influenced by the actions of that individual.

Young people make career decisions within their horizons for action. Horizons for action incorporate dispositions of the habitus as well as externally located opportunities in the labour market. Horizons for action can be both enabling as well as restricting. Opportunities may also be created such as for example when young people, their relatives or friends may be used to contact a training placement. By means of the habitus, horizons

for action are often based on interpretations of the present made in the light of past experiences. This happens because young people and their parents try to make sense of the current labour market scenario through their experience of past situations which might no longer apply. (Brown 1987 in Hodkinson et al., 1996).

Colley, James, Tedder and Diment (2003) have coined the term “vocational habitus” and maintain that it allows us a concept to help describe the fact that Vocational Education and Training (VET) does encourage a “reflexive project of the self” but this project is often tightly bounded, both in relation to one’s existing habitus and in accordance with a disciplinary discourse about the self that one has to become. The process of learning as becoming is one that is actively co-constructed by students, but the possibilities are not boundless for most young people in VET. Vocational habitus also promises two developments: Firstly, it expresses the original sense of the term “vocation” as calling and therefore helps to convey the pull of a vocational culture to include (and to exclude) people from certain social groupings. It appears to offer a tool for thinking about the way in which practices are regulated within that culture in ways that produce new identities, but also reproduces existing ones such as gender stereotypes. Secondly it endorses what Heller (1979) in Colley et al. (2003) maintains in that feelings and morals also have to be learned along with thoughts and actions. This is inextricably entwined with notions of personal change which include changes in values and attitudes (Mackenzie Davey and Arnold, 2000). Thus vocational habitus offers a way of expressing how these learning sites shape students’ ability to respond to complex emotional influences and demands within the vocational culture. In doing so it renders visible aspects of the hidden curriculum of these learning sites examples of which might be the role of class and gender in socially reproductive processes. Vocational habitus allows us to think about ‘sense’ in the sense of one’s proper place and it expresses the structural pull that certain occupations have for

young people from “characteristic biographies/trajectories” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 55; in Colley et al., 2003) and the agentic ease in which vocational cultures are co-constructed by students, tutors and dominant discourses within VET. Vocational habitus also reminds us of the notion of our sensitivity as human beings in that it helps us think about emotional aspects of learning and the deep personal involvement that VET demands of young people as they move into particular sectors of the labour market.

3.1.3.1 Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) states that communities of practice are everywhere and that individuals all belong to a number of them: At work, at school, at home, and in hobbies. Individuals are core members of some and peripheral members of others. A typical example might be a member of a music band as being a core member, or someone who just comes to rehearsals to hang around with the group thus being a more peripheral member. Whatever form this participation takes, most individuals are familiar with the experience of belonging to a community of practice.

Wenger (1999) states that communities of practice sprout everywhere and participants of this thesis in some way deal with the agenda of the institution and the storms and stresses of youth. These communities sprout *“in the classroom as well as on the playground, officially and in the cracks”* (Wenger, 1998:6). Wenger states that the learning which is most “personally transformative” involves the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice. Since the majority of the participants in this thesis are involved in work placements whilst two of them are full-time workers, it seems legitimate to take a look at what Wenger has to say about workers. He in fact declares that workers organize their lives together with their immediate colleagues and clients in order to get their job done. Thus they are able to maintain or develop a sense of self which they can live with

and which tries to maintain a suitable work-life balance. No matter what the official job description entails, they create a practice to do what needs to be done. Students at MCAST are shadowing workers either through placement or apprenticeship programmes and are thus being socialised into these communities of practice.

Members of a community are bound informally by what they are doing together—from engaging in discussions to solving intricate problems. A further binding agent is the learning that they have achieved through their mutual engagement in these activities. A community of practice differs to a community of interest or a geographical community, because neither of them implies a shared practice. Thus in summary, a community of practice defines itself along three dimensions:

- What it is about—its *joint enterprise* as understood and continually renegotiated by its members
- How it functions—the relationships of *mutual engagement* that bind members together into a social entity
- What capability it has produced—the *shared repertoire* of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time.

Communities of practice develop around things that matter to people. As a result, their practices reflect the members' own understanding of what is important such as for example the way work is prioritised when there is lack of resources. Obviously, outside constraints or directives can influence this understanding, but even then, members develop practices that are their own response to these external influences. Even when a community's actions conform to an external pressure, it is the community and not the

external force that creates and implements the practice. In this sense, communities of practice are creators of their own organisation systems.

Communities of practice are said to have their own stages of development as is depicted in Figure 3.2 below. These stages of development which students form part of, will inevitably bring about change as the individual learner strives to keep up to the norms and exigencies of the community. There is an interplay of several communities for the student namely the placement setting, his/her class within college as well as the broader aspect of the college with its constraints and directives and which is also influenced by external constraints and directives of MCAST in its entirety as an educational institution. MCAST is then influenced by stakeholders with their interest in eventually having qualified workers who would fill in the current as well as future job requirements. There are other communities of practice which the student has to contend with namely their family, their friends inside or outside college as well as hobby memberships.

Of particular interest in this case would be the entry of a student in an already-established community of practice which is what usually happens during apprenticeship or work placement. Here the student enters a community of practice which is already at the active stage whilst s/he is still personally finding his/her own potential as well as recognizing the potential of others at this place of work. Furthermore since a work placement, more often than not, lasts less than five weeks, the “memorable stage” (refer to figure 3.2) for the student assumes a more important role in learning.

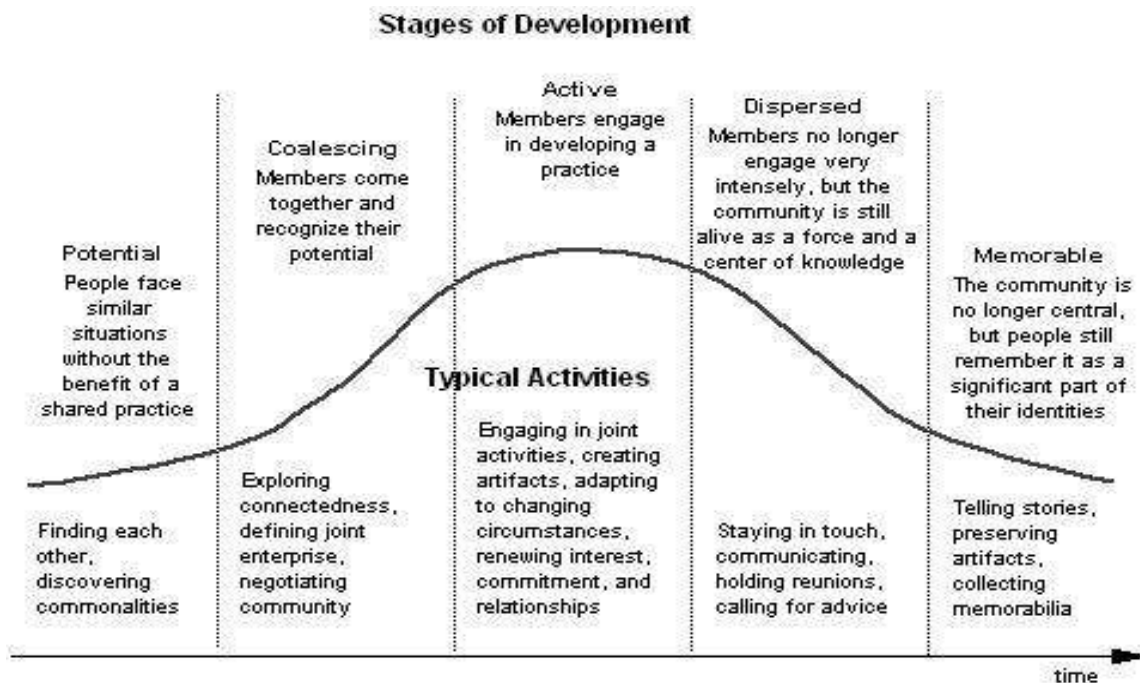


Figure 3.2: Stages of Development in Communities of Practice
Source: Wenger (1998: 3)

Fuller (2007) views Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of learning as the individual participating within a community of practice by providing a very different concept of learning. This theory departs from the traditional views of learning which are preoccupied either *"with the mind and the ways in which learning results in changed mental states or with behaviour and how changes in this behaviour can be brought about through the formula of stimulus-response."* (Fuller, 2007: 19). In fact Lave and Wenger's theory tackles the collective of group as the important unit of analysis rather than the individual as the latter is important only when his/her learning is considered in social relation to others. The relational network found in workplace learning is the key to understanding learning and not the before, during and after states of the individual. Furthermore, Fuller (2007) points out that people learn through their co-participation in the shared practices of the "community" or the "lived-in world". Through participation, people thus learn to become full members of relevant community(ies) of practice. Learning thus becomes a form of identity formation which is

similar to what goes on when individuals undergo organisational socialisation and personal change as described in section 3.1.1.4. Moreover, contrary to traditional theories on learning, Fuller (2007) points out that Lave and Wenger (1991) do not see the “expert” within a community of practice to be a qualified or recognised teacher; nor do they conceive of the “novice” as a passive recipient of knowledge made available through traditional forms of instruction. For Lave and Wenger (1991), the subject matter is available to newcomers through increased participation with others in the relevant and structured social practice of the community. Fuller and Unwin (2004) argue that the concepts of “novice” and “expert” are not stable or uniform concepts and that the pedagogy they imply, cannot simply be characterised as one-way transmission. In contrast to the accounts provided by Lave and Wenger (1991), Fuller and Unwin (2004) found that not all novices are the same and not all experts are the same. They found that apprentices were considerably more expert in some tasks than their older and more experienced colleagues. This occurred for activities which usually involved the use of information technology. Moreover Fuller and Unwin (2004; 2005) also found a wide variety in the richness and extent of their participants’ “learning territories”. It seems that learning and work dispositions of the subjects in their studies differed and this had an effect on the extent to which they identified and engaged in opportunities to learn at work.

Fuller (2007) draws up the reasons as to which communities of practice may be considered to be underdeveloped as a concept. This is iterated by Lave and Wenger (1991) themselves and they highlight areas for further elaboration such as the influence of power structures and also truncation of possibilities of mastery within the community. Furthermore, communities of practice can create conditions which inhibit or give rise to alternative learning outcomes. Another issue is the use of the term “community” which according to Jewson in Fuller (2007) is highly questionable as it implies that all workers, work groups and

managers share common interests thus assuming a high degree of unitarianism (Dawson, 1996). Although the lack of attention in defining communities of practice has given flexibility, it has also made it difficult to operationalize it in any sort of consistent fashion. Lave and Wenger (1991) in Fuller (2007) make an attempt to focus on the temporal dimension of communities of practice in that the concept of the legitimate peripheral participant's learning journey culminates in the displacement of "old timers". Another way in which a community of practice may be defined is through the socio-spatial dimension (Fuller, 2007). The difficulty here according to Fuller lies in defining where socio-spatial boundaries should be drawn for analysing the learning process.

Other difficulties in Lave and Wenger's (1991) original proposal focus on the adequacy of "learning as participation". Hager (2005) in Fuller (2007) argues that traditional approaches to learning (acquisition) and the concept of learning as participation are not mutually exclusive. Hager maintains that while participation is a process, the learner acquires more of the right characteristics which enable him/her to belong to the community of practice. Hager (2005) also points out three main limitations in the work of Lave and Wenger (1991). He states that their work overlooks the importance of the process of construction. As also pointed out elsewhere in this chapter of my thesis, learning, the self and the world are mutually constituted and reconstituted. The way in which participation is portrayed within Lave and Wenger's work seems to imply that it is rather conservative in that it serves continuity and reproduction rather than discontinuity and transformation. Fuller (2007) refers to the work by Hager (2005) and Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) in that participation in the case of the proposal by Lave and Wenger (1991) fails to provide an explanation for learning that has universal applicability. This is also iterated by Edwards (2005) cited in Fuller (2007) in that participation as a concept in its own right fails to account for the way in which new learning comes about and how new knowledge is produced. The

concept of participation in that it has become largely a non-cognitive approach to understanding learning is a departure from earlier work by Lave (1988) which was strongly concerned with cognition.

Fuller (2007) also cites Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2007) who suggest that there are two interpretations of the term “communities of practice”: One broad and one narrow. The broad perspective focuses on the notions of participation, belonging and social relations whilst the narrow view focuses on learning that occurs in very small groups. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2007) maintain that both narrow and broad versions are helpful but they should be referred to using different terminology. The broader version should be termed as “situated learning or learning as social participation” and only the narrower version should be referred to as communities of practice. (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004 in Fuller, 2007).

In 1998, Wenger recognised that the earlier work produced in conjunction with Lave in 1991 focused on only one kind of participation. He thus identified five trajectories:

- Inbound trajectory: Newcomers are joining the community with the prospect of becoming full participants in its practice.
- Peripheral: By choice or by necessity, some trajectories never lead to full participation
- Insider: The formation of an identity does not end with full membership
- Boundary: Some trajectories find their value in spanning boundaries and linking communities of practice
- Outbound: Some trajectories lead out of a community, as when children grow up.

Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson and Unwin (2005) develop the notion of different trajectories when they highlight the importance of researching individuals' backgrounds and dispositions. For them what the individual brings to that community from the outside is equally important. This individual thus learns to belong in their new setting by adapting, developing and modifying their whole person in that process.

Fuller and Unwin (2003) found that apprentices who were exposed to multiple settings and networks of social relations enjoyed a more expansive experience than their peers who were confined to a single site. Furthermore those whose apprenticeship included the opportunity to participate in formal educational institutions as well as in different departments at work were afforded the most chances to make connections between different types of learning and experience. Apprentices are required to trust the system and hope to find a placement with an employer who is committed to the concept of an apprenticeship. According to Unwin (2007) this would mean that certain conditions are created in the workplace and that the dual identity held by an apprentice as a worker and learner is protected. However Fuller and Unwin (2003) ascertain that employers would want apprentices to move far too quickly to the position of productive workers and hence they are denied the opportunity to spend appropriate time as legitimate peripheral participants. In the UK (and also in Malta), apprenticeship frameworks differ in terms of the specified qualifications to be achieved and the ratio of off-the-job training. This in itself creates a diverse situation for different kind of communities of practice. Fuller and Unwin (2003) have researched the different types of learning environments which UK apprentices encounter as an "expansive-restrictive" continuum. Environments which are closer to the expansive end of the continuum would embed apprenticeship within the broader business plan and also workforce development plans of the organisation; would provide opportunities to learn in

both on and off the job settings; ensure that the qualifications are achieved within the period of the apprenticeship and protect the dual identity of the apprentice and worker.

Goodwin (2007) states that Lave and Wenger's (1991) conceptualisations of communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation are applicable to the individual's experience of transition from school to work. Young people make the transition from novices to old-timers via two types of interactions with the older workers. These two types of interactions lead to the learning of two types of behaviours; the first are the occupational behaviours and skills required to do the job and the second are those behaviours appropriate to being an adult. Goodwin (2007) also points out that the second type of behaviours have been neglected in Lave and Wenger's work with the emphasis placed on occupational practice.

3.1.4 Conclusion to Theories and Models Supporting the Experience of Transition

In the first part of this chapter, I have attempted to expose the reader to the literature which supports transition(s) more particularly to those which are relevant to the focus of this thesis. The first section of this review focused the individual and reviews some of the most prominent literature the self, personal change and role innovation, to their perceived status as a learner and worker as well as self-efficacy. The second section refers to curricula, choices and transition education and the way that these impact on the individual student in transition. The final part of this section focused on habitus, horizons for action, vocational habitus and communities of practice.

This section concludes by means of the model proposed by Ball et al. (2000) in that it seems to draw the main arguments of the first part of this chapter together. Ball et al. (2000: 148) name this figure: "Arenas of Action and Centres of Choice." They state that "*our focus*

upon education, training and work marginalises or obscures other points of focus that may be really much more important in the lives of the young people” (Ball et al., 2000: 146). Thus the figure below which is entirely reproduced gives equal importance to three defined areas which are: “Family, Home and Domesticity”, “Work, Education and Training” and “Leisure and Social Life.” These areas, given equal importance and overlap, are the essence of the experiences of young people in transition.

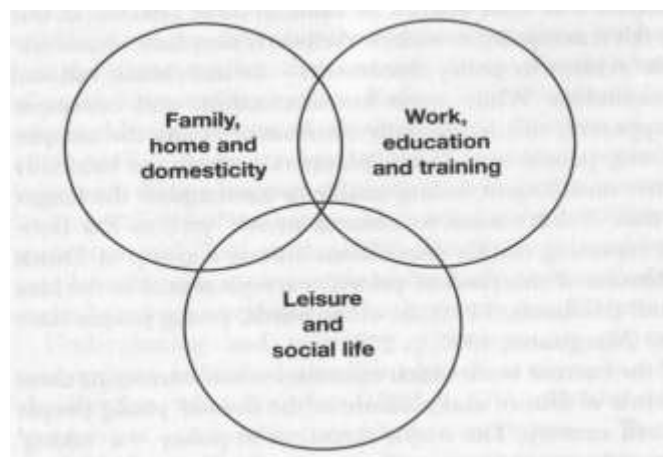


Figure 3.3: Arenas of Action and Centres of Choice

Source: Figure 11.1 in Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000: 148). Choice, Pathways and Transitions Post-16.

In the next section I will now expose the reader to the actual literature about transitions. This shall be divided into three separate sub-sections namely transitions at the macro, meso and micro levels. Dawson (1996: xxviii) refers to these levels in a different manner as individual, group, organisation and society. Klein and Kozlowski (2000) and Grant and Marshak (2008), however, refer to micro, meso and macro levels in research. The micro level refers to what the individual experiences whilst the meso level explores individuals amongst themselves at the interpersonal, group level. At the meso level, interactions depend on the actions and behaviour of the individuals in a localised context. The macro level then focuses on the aggregation of an amalgam of meso-level experiences.

3.2 Meanings of Transition

Literature on this area indicates that there is no one meaning of transition as there are many definitions, concepts as well as contexts in which the word transition is used. Ecclestone (2009) portrays this very well as follows:

Like many ideas that inform policy, practice and research, “transition” has numerous everyday and conceptual meanings. Children make a transition to adulthood, pupils move from primary to secondary school, from school to work, training or further education. More broadly, major life events are seen as transitions, when people change their sense of who they are, perhaps from single status to marriage or the other way round, take on a new occupational role or emigrate to a new country. Such transitions can lead to profound change or be an impetus for new learning, or they can be unsettling, difficult and unproductive. Some transitions are forced, compulsory or chosen. Yet, while certain transitions are unsettling and difficult for some people, risk, challenge and even difficulty might also be important factors in successful transitions for others.

(Ecclestone, 2009: 2)

Although this form of transition, as also outlined in this definition, gives the impression that the effects or the transitory behaviour happen in the time between Point A to Point B, effectively transitory experiences and their effect carry over much beyond the final destination. To give a simple example is to relate this to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder where for example soldiers in Vietnam continued to experience the change imposed on them by the war long after the experience itself. This definition by Ecclestone (2009) should not be tied down to any one of the three but it should draw on all levels of analysis, namely the macro, meso and micro levels

3.2.1 Transitions at the Macro Level

As described earlier on in this chapter, the type of transitions which I will focus on here are those which are pertaining to cultural patterns particular to types of institutions and

also countries. Here it is assumed that the individual will act in a particular way according to the group in which s/he belongs.

3.2.1.1. Institutional or Context-Specific Transitions

Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson and Crosnoe (2003) state that transitions are usually institutional or context-specific and suggest that *“individuals generally work out their own life course in relation to institutionalised pathways and normative patterns.”* (Elder et al. 2003:8). Ecclestone (2009) mentions Pallas (1992) who describes transitions as attributes of social systems rather than as attributes of an person’s life course: *“Pathways are well-travelled sequences of transitions that are shaped by cultural and structural forces....A trajectory is an attribute of an individual whereas a pathway is an attribute of a social system.”* (Pallas, 1992: 168 In Ecclestone, 2009). Thus educational attainment is determined by movement through *“an ordered sequence of educational transitions”* (Pallas, 1992: 172-173 in Ecclestone, 2009). On a larger scale one might also take transition regimes into account. The IRIS Report (2004) outlines different transition regimes whereby the interplay of socio-economic structures, institutions and cultural patterns is understood primarily through the selectivity or permeability of education, the standardisation of training, regulation of labour market entrance, entitlements to social benefits and the dominant concepts of youth. In the “universalistic transition regime” (Denmark) young people have choice even within education and the active labour market. As long as they remain active, they are entitled to allowances, wages or benefits, and this reflects the centrality of motivation for personal development in citizenship. However, since a residual group of migrant youth resulted as unreached in the project, it is suggested that young people need to buy into a specific cultural model before being able to profit from a transition system which, in principle, allows for participation and choice biographies. In the “liberal transition regime” (examples of which are the United Kingdom and Ireland) policies are much more

clearly geared towards the early labour market integration and economic independence of young people. On one hand, priority of individual responsibility is reflected in a flexible system of education and training while on the other hand there are measures for the most vulnerable to participate. Policies exert pressure to ensure that young people do not remain unemployed and dependent on social benefits. Flexible spaces are thus counteracted by individualised risks and pressure. For Germany and the Netherlands, which are categorized as part of the “employment-centred regime”, transitions are structured by a selective school system and standardised vocational training for youth is interpreted as allocation to occupational positions. Those in regular trajectories are secure while others face high risks of exclusion in that disadvantage means that individual deficits need to be compensated before making “real” choices. The fourth regime type is the “sub-protective transition” type inherent in countries which are part of Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal and Spain). Its main feature is a structural deficit with regard to the lack of links between education and employment resulting in long waiting periods, high unemployment and increasing precariousness while the lack of welfare rights makes young people dependant on their families. Youth organisations are increasingly becoming the only bridges towards an active social life often without systematic links with the labour market. This deficit however implies that social space is less institutionalised so that some voluntary initiative can eventually turn into careers yet precarious ones. The fifth and final regime type is the “post-socialist” transition regime (Romania) where de-standardisation is dramatic. In the communist period education and employment were tightly linked with little individual choice but considerable security. Presently, education, training and the labour market fail to keep pace with transformation and the increasing risks of social exclusion. State institutions have lost credibility in contrast to the few non-governmental organisations who manage to secure funding to close the gaps of training, youth work or social policies. Rather than finding spaces for experimentation and initiative young people have to accumulate any possible

training and qualifications for potential opportunities. A minority of them succeed by opening up their own businesses. For the others participation mainly takes place in dreams of emigration.

3.2.2 Transitions at the Meso Level

This section focuses on transitions which occur at the interpersonal or group level of analysis. In this section I focus on the work by Hallam (2010) since I believe that particular expertise belongs to a particular occupation or group of people

3.2.2.1 Transitions and the Development of Expertise

Hallam (2010: 2) states that *“The way that learners increase their knowledge and skills in a domain can be conceptualised as the development of expertise.”* Hallam (2010: 2) cites Hoffman (1998) who suggests a progression in developing expertise. This progression starts from naïve (total beginner) to novice (someone with minimal exposure) to initiate (an individual who has been through an initiation ceremony and begun introductory instruction), apprentice (one who is immersed in the domain), journeyman (one who can work without supervision but with clear aims which are set), expert (the distinguished or brilliant journeyman) and finally master (one of an elite group). This progression as identified by Hoffman (1998) poses great similarity to the way in which the courses at MCAST have been developed. Levels 1 and 2 namely the Introductory and Foundation Certificates are equitable to the naïve and the novice stages. The initiate and apprentice are equitable to the Level 3 and Level 4 Diplomas. The journeyman certificate is offered by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) which was briefly described as offering apprenticeship schemes and briefly outlined in Section 2.2.2.2 of the previous chapter. The journeyman certificate is offered to those candidates who have qualified at a vocational institution and are then assessed after a period of time on full-time work. Alternatively there may be individuals who

never attained formal certification and who would still attempt to qualify themselves because they would have gained the knowledge required whilst learning on the job. The expert stage is also being catered for by MCAST in that it is now offering higher national diplomas and top-up degrees.

Interestingly, Hallam (2010) does not develop her arguments relating to the above stages but takes a more generic stance. Her work is developed upon fifteen propositions which again related to the impact of transitions on the development of expertise which I will take to be synonymous to learning. The following subsections each describe the propositions as outlined by Hallam (2010). Furthermore, citing Hallam (2010) in the pertaining sections of the chapter would have also taken away the sense of completeness and robustness of her work in this area. Moreover, where appropriate, these propositions will be supplemented by an explanation of their relevance in the context of this study thus enabling the reader to identify the reasons behind the choice of reviewing this literature.

- Developing expertise requires transition through three phases from conscious and effortful processing to automisation.

At first learning is conscious and the learner is fully aware of each and every step that s/he has to make in the process of completing a task. Here, learning is supported only when the learner has a clear mental representation of both the process as well as the goal of learning and feedback is available, either directly from the environment or from observers. Through association, the learner then learns to put together a particular sequence of responses which gradually become more fluent until finally the skill becomes automated, is carried out without conscious effort and continues to develop each time it is used. Hence the learner becomes quicker and more fluent. Hallam (2010) points out that at any of the three stages of skill namely conscious, associative and automisation, there is

potential for difficulties. Instructions may not be understood, and feedback may be unclear or unsuitable for the learner. Learners may not have enough opportunities for active learning in the domain and automaticity may thus never develop.

- Inability to negotiate conceptual transitions can limit the level of expertise attained.

Greiffenhagen and Sherman (2006: 3) maintain that *“One fundamental assumption of Conceptual Change is the view that pupils’ prior knowledge – alternatively called ‘naïve knowledge’ (Vosniadou 1989), ‘naïve beliefs’ (McCloskey 1983; Reiner et al. 1988), ‘informal science’ (Driver et al. 1994), or ‘children’s science’ (Osborne 1980; Gilbert et al. 1982; D. Kuhn 1989) – is ‘in conflict’ or ‘in competition’ with what they are supposed to learn in school science.”* Such a term was in fact introduced by Kuhn (1964 in Hallam 2010), and it implies that if learners are unable to make the conceptual shifts required in order to develop a deeper understanding, their progression to expert learning is going to be limited. This proposition is also relevant to the different assessment systems which are used in secondary school as opposed to the ones operated by MCAST. Advancement in learning may be impeded because of the conceptual change required from the deeply ingrained summative-type of assessment which went on during secondary school which must be rapidly replaced by a formative, criterion-based type of assessment at MCAST.

- Inability to negotiate conceptual transitions relating to understanding the nature of knowledge can limit the level of expertise attained.

Hallam (2010: 9) seems to establish that knowledge acquisition can be perceived along a continuum. On one end of this continuum we see that where knowledge is perceived as “absolute, simple, stable and transmitted by authority” whilst on the other end it can be perceived as “complex, uncertain and derived from reason.” The more absolute this perception is, the lower the academic performance of the individual. This seems to imply that where individuals perceive that they are helpless in their acquisition of knowledge

since this is entirely transmitted by authority which in this case is the teacher/lecturer they are more likely to perform at the lower end of the spectrum. In other instances which refer to when knowledge is seen as being a process of acquisition by the individual where the latter is also an active stakeholder in the process, it is likely that performance would be at the higher end of the spectrum. The learning system adopted by MCAST should encourage the use of individual learning and of complex reasoning abilities which may be diametrically opposed to what goes on during secondary education.

- Inability to negotiate conceptual transitions relating to the nature of learning and understanding can limit the level of expertise attained.

Saljo (1982) in Hallam (2010) maintains that adults who think about learning in a more sophisticated way recognise a variety of different learning approaches and understand that effective learning depends on finding the most appropriate ways of tackling a particular task for a specific purpose in a given context. Students must have the appropriate preparatory knowledge prior to approaching a task to be learnt and can be as important as the particular nature of the assessment chosen for the same task. Consequently, teachers/lecturers who apriori think that no matter what they do or how much they prepare, their students will not manage to learn a task might not be bothered in adequately preparing them for it. The way the curriculum is imparted and prepared for the students seems to have an effect on the success the student has in finding the most appropriate way.

- Inability to develop metacognitive and self-regulatory skills can limit the level of expertise attained

Metacognition in its traditional usage refers to thinking about one's thinking. Metacognition refers to the ability to hear the "talk" (sometimes referred to as internal chatter) and respond to the "talk" by using personal strategies to intervene in negative "talk" and respond positively to use one's learning processes with intention (Johnston, 1994). In

order to be able to progress in learning, motivated learners need to understand metacognition. It is not the term per se that is important but that learners need to know and understand their own learning and be able to regulate it. Without metacognitive and self-regulatory skills, and since learning is just one facet of the student's life, there is little chance that individuals may maintain the motivation and concentration required to be able to proceed with their learning and may focus their energies elsewhere. Just like any other skill metacognition, more often than not, needs to be taught and students need to be guided into using metacognitive skills.

- Self-beliefs can limit or promote the development of expertise

Hallam (2010) maintains that as individuals develop expertise, their relative success in doing so depends on their self-beliefs. Self-beliefs may include beliefs about the nature of their intelligence, their ability to complete tasks and their self-concept.

- Motivation is crucial in the development of expertise and is affected by transitions

Intrinsic (internalised) motivation may be generated by interesting tasks in the short term. However, this interest must be internalised and integrated within the individual's identity for motivation to be sustained over long periods of time (Hallam, 2010). Motivation is vital in learning because of the considerable investment of time and effort that is required. Furthermore as stated in the previous section in relation to metacognition, formal learning is just one of the many facets that students are experiencing in their lives and therefore motivation in learning becomes key in attaining ultimate success.

- Transitions can pre-empt decisions about the areas of expertise to be developed

Hallam (2010) states that transitions between learning environments may offer new opportunities for learners which can lead to loss of motivation to continue pursuing existing

areas of expertise. This break in continuity may provide an avenue for abolishing those areas in which the individual has lost interest or feels that they are making insufficient progress.

- Emotions are crucial in determining the way that transitions between or within learning environments are negotiated.

Transitions between learning environments are often viewed with mixed emotions. There may be sadness about leaving some things behind alongside positive anticipation of new activities accompanied by a degree of concern (Hallam, 2010). Hallam in this instance focuses on the transition of pupils from primary to secondary school and maintains that this anxiety tends to subside considerably during the first year. Cotterell (1986) in Hallam (2010) states that the length of the period of adjustment depends on the approach of the child, the coping strategy adopted, and having adequate information. Hallam (2010) maintains that the personal and social effects of transition may be less significant now than they once were because more support is now offered by the receiving institutions.

- Transitions between different learning environments frequently lead to a decline or no progress in the development of an expertise

Transitions between learning environments can lead to worsening or lack of progression in the area of expertise. Reported declines on transfer between schools may be related to the lack of opportunities to practice skills in the summer recess. In research carried out by Green (1997) and Mizelle and Mullins (1997) cited in Hallam (2010) students reported that could cope better if they had been given more challenging work in their previous school and had been taught more strategies for working independently.

- Discontinuity in curricula and pedagogy can disrupt the development of expertise

Transitions between educational institutions tend to inherently bring about discontinuity in curricula (Hallam, 2010). Furthermore when students are required to tackle

things that they believe they know, they might get bored (Yates, 1999 in Hallam, 2010).

Kruse (1996), on the other hand, maintains that other changes may also have an impact.

These are an over-reliance on text books, lack of student collaboration and active learning, little reflection on the learning process and an assumption that all students will benefit from the same thing at the same time.

- Learners may be distracted from a focus on the development of expertise during transitions between different learning environments

Adjusting to a new scenario, losing old friends and making new ones, as well as getting used to new lecturers and new expectations about the work involved will have to be coped with. This is of course in addition to the actual learning content that the individual needs to embrace. Transitions thus require the acquisition of tacit knowledge about the new situation and consequently reduce the time that could be spent in expertise development (Hallam, 2010). Furthermore, educational transitions may also coincide with other changes such as the transition to puberty which may be delayed and also transitions in the home environment such as marital separation, death and moving house.

- Failure to successfully negotiate transitions in learning environments can disrupt the development of expertise and lead to drop out

Difficulties in transitions are strongly related to the likelihood of school dropout (Roderick and Camburn, 1999 in Hallam 2010). Reasons for this are reflected in the lack of relevance in the curriculum required to cover for GCSE's. At MCAST, students must attend 80% of the programme, which they enrolled for, in order to achieve their final certification. However, some research shows that not all students express their disaffection through non-attendance. Some, mostly boys, do so by exhibiting behaviour which would lead to exclusion either for a fixed term or permanently.

- Some individuals are more at risk during transitions than others

Hallam (2010) points out that some students are vulnerable throughout their educational careers and particularly at times of transition. A review of data from fifteen countries in Europe found that pupils with emotional, social and/or behavioural difficulties were regarded as presenting the greatest challenge. (Meijer, 2001 in Hallam, 2010)

- In developing expertise learners need to negotiate a wide range of different types of transitions

The above propositions have shown that transition routes have become increasingly individualised and frequently involve elements of individual choice. As individuals adapt to transitions they go through a process of cognitive restructuring. In developing expertise or increase in learning, individuals may experience transitions involving learning environments either between or within institutions, teachers and facilitators, pedagogical practices, peer and friendship groups, expectations of performance and types of assessment, changes in required skills, conceptual understanding, perceptions of the nature of knowledge itself, ways of thinking about learning and ways of thinking about self and identity.

Although Hallam (2010) treats various issues in that they pertain to individual students, she does not take particular cases and does not treat her findings as individual trajectories. For this reason I have chosen to put her work at the meso level of analysis as the individual students are treated as a group. In the next section, we will look at the micro level of analysis since most theories or findings reviewed in this section make use of individual pathways as their line of reasoning.

3.2.3 Transitions at the Micro Level

3.2.3.1 Transition as a Lifelong Event occurring for the Individual

Banks, Bates, Breakwell, Bynner, Emler, Jamieson and Roberts (1992) state that transitions are influenced by elements of a person's whole life, rather than merely through their involvement with education systems. According to Ecclestone (2009) other researchers such as Hughes (2002) state that the whole of life is a form of transition, a permanent state of "becoming" and "unbecoming" much of which is unconscious, contradictory and iterative. Some feminist researchers argue that many depictions of transition ignore the particular distinctiveness of women's transitional experiences (Fisher in Hughes, 2002). In contrast to movements from one life stage to the next which are interspersed with periods of stability, many women argue that they have been psychologically in transit almost all their adolescent and adult lives (Hughes, 2002). Quinn (2006: 4) cites Grosz who states that a subject is not an entity but a series of flows, energies, movements and capacities capable of being linked together in ways other than those that congeal it into an identity. Thus *"we are always lost in transition, not just in the sense of moving from one task or context to another, but as a condition of our subjectivity"* (Quinn, 2006:4). Spiteri (2007) in fact talks about fragmented transitions and states that recent research on school-to-work transitions has moved away from the analysis of direct transitions from the school bench to the work place. Spiteri (2007: 1) implies that people opt to take up different jobs rather than to choose a job for life in the manner that had once been the established practice. Therefore individuals now change jobs for a considerable number of times throughout their lives sometimes re-engaging themselves in schooling in some slot of time between jobs or by combining schooling with work. Du Bois Reymonds, Plug, Stauber, Pohl, Walther and Hayes (2002a) state that under conditions of individualised and fragmented transitions subjectivity plays an increasingly crucial role as individuals have to integrate decisions into their life plans. In their everyday life transitions different life spheres are interlinked: education and work, family, partnership and sexuality,

lifestyle and consumption, citizenship and others (Coles, 1995 and MacDonald, 1998 In Du Bois et al., 2002; Ball et al., 2000).

Levinson (1986) mentions that between the ages of 17 and 22 individuals undergo an Early Adult Transition. The primary tasks of every transitional period are to reappraise the existing structure, to explore trajectories for change in oneself and the world, and to move toward commitment to the vital choices that form the basis for a new life structure in the ensuing period. Levinson (1986) maintains that no life structure is permanently stable as our existence asserts the necessity of periodic change. In the Early Adult Transition, *“the budding adult modifies his or her relationships with the family and other components of the pre-adult world and begins to form a place as an adult in the adult world”* (Levinson, 1986:5). Through his studies of both men and women he claims to have found an invariant basic pattern with infinite manifest variations and that life structure develops through a relatively orderly sequence of age linked periods during the adult years. Levinson (1986) asserts that this was a finding, not an a priori hypothesis that life structure should show such regularity in its adult development, given the absence of similar regularity in ego development, moral development, career development, and other specific aspects of life. The sequence consists of an alternating series of “structure-building” and “structure-changing” (transitional) periods. The primary task in a structure-building period is to form a life structure and enhance life within it. Individuals must make certain key choices, form a structure around them, and pursue values and goals within this structure. If one succeeds in creating a structure, life is not necessarily tranquil. The task of building a structure is often stressful indeed, and sometimes individuals discover that it is not as satisfactory as hoped or planned. A structure-building period ordinarily lasts five to seven years, ten at the most (Levnison, 1986) Then once again the life structure that has formed the basis for stability comes into question and must be modified. The structure-changing period lasts around 5

years. The Early Adult Transition falls under the “novice phase” (Levinson, 1986:5) providing an opportunity to move beyond adolescence and to build a provisional but necessarily flawed entry life structure and to learn the limitations of that structure. In this phase individuals are both excited and terrified of living in this era. Levinson (1985:5) maintains that it is an era of extremes with “rich satisfactions” and “bitter disappointments” culminating in the end result of having attained much more in some areas and much less in others than what was previously envisioned.

3.2.3.2 Different Transitional Pathways

Evans and Heinz (1993; 1994) have also identified different transitional pathways pertaining to the different trajectories that individuals undertake. The first type of transition is defined as “Strategic Transition Behaviour”. This transition is planful, very often linked to a clear-cut vocational choice and to definite occupational goals. This behaviour was found to exist among young people in Trajectory I, namely those who are moving towards higher education. Those following this career trajectory also performed step-by-step transition behaviour. However step-by-step behaviour was also seen where the occupational choice was not so clear cut and there seems to be a process of searching for an interesting occupation. It also seems that the one taken up is not tied down to a definite occupational goal. Young people following Trajectory I I preferred this behaviour. Another type of behaviour is that characterised by taking chances which consists of occupation related activities that are characterised by finding out about one’s interests either by confronting oneself with demanding training or educational processes, or by following a specific aptitude. This behaviour was found among young people from all the four trajectories but it was mainly those in Trajectory I I I that were taking chances. The fourth and final type of transition behaviour is termed “wait and see” and is characterised by an attitude of learned helplessness, where one is happy if the situation does not get worse and there is a vague

hope that the situation will get better in the future. It is mainly young people in Trajectories I I I and IV who look back to a transition history that is marked by disappointments and failures.

Du Bois Reymonds, Plug, Stauber, Pohl, Walther & Hayes (2002) distinguished between “disengaged” and “trendsetters”. The formal definition refers to those young people who are disengaged or in the process of disengagement with the formal transition system whilst the latter refers to those youths who have been successful in a broad and personally denied sense by following individual learning pathways. They however point out that “disengaged” and “trend-setters” distinctions served only heuristic reasons in that the material they attained from 280 interviewees from 10 countries in Europe rarely matched these ideal types. They comment that such descriptors are inspired by the dominant assumptions of normality which lead to policies that tend to de-motivate young people and to waste learning motivation but also to research that runs the risk of neglecting overlooking or actively hiding the complexity of young people’s transitions, identities and strategies, their strengths and weaknesses. Walther, Hejl, Jensen and Hayes (2002) point out that choice and risk do structure transitions in less collective ways but result in more individualised trajectories and that the fragmentation and pluralisation of life worlds have led to situations in which individuals have to choose and to plan their own life.

Wyn and Dwyer (2000) point out that many aspects of transition need to be rethought as the notion of *“youth as a phase in the transition to the way of achieving adulthood”* fits more closely as a description of past patterns experienced by the “baby boomers” generation. They were the first to experience the effects of more prolonged universal education as part of post-war rebuilding and expansion. Stokes (2004: 9) in fact states that childhood as a time for one’s dependence has increased and it sometimes

reaches into a person's third decade of life. Moreover where adolescence has once existed as a brief demarcation between childhood and adulthood, it has now become a major life phase, sometimes lasting for decades. Hence the importance of denoting "YO-YO transitions". The IRIS Report (2004) states that there are at least six transition patterns of youths who participated in the project which are smooth, institutionally repaired, alternative, stagnant, downward/damaged, unknown/other. The "smooth" transition is that which is in line with institutional logic and without any major interruptions. Linked to the concept of agency, it would seem that it is the pattern in which a student would need to exert the least amount of agentic behaviour in a "go with the flow" attitude. The "institutionally repaired pattern" is the one in which the student would have had some sort of interruption which would have been controlled and remediated by the Institution. The "alternative" pattern is the one which leaves institutional logic at least partly by choice and is the one which implies the greatest use of agency. It is the pattern in which was undertaken the most by the trendsetter participants of the research. The "stagnant" pattern involves progress stifled by constant interruptions and failure with the risk of exclusion. The "downward/damaged pattern" showed an accumulation of risks of social exclusion whilst the "unknown/other" pattern was used when no clear pattern was observable. The IRIS Report (2004) also outlines different transition regimes whereby the interplay of socio-economic structures, institutions and cultural patterns is understood primarily through the selectivity or permeability of education, the standardisation of training, regulation of labour market entrance, entitlements to social benefits and the dominant concepts of youth. The following are thus the different contexts in which the "disengaged" and "trendsetters" were carrying out their transitions.

3.2.3.3 Social and Cultural Transitions in Response to a Broader Context of Structural Change

Ecclestone (2009: 6) states that some literature shows how social and cultural transitions combine turning points, milestones or life events with subtle, complex processes of “becoming somebody” personally, educationally and occupationally. This is where the work by Ball et al. (2000) and Evans (2002) is situated. Such transitions may be a reaction to particular events and may involve shifts and developments in identity and agency. Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) state that career transitions are located and enacted within specific fields rather than as a fixed series of rational decisions made pre-career, and show how transitions emerge through periods of routine and stability as well as from change.

3.2.4 Conceptualising Definitions of Transition(s)

This section has attempted to look at the different ways of defining transitions and also at the different units of analysis that are taken into account, namely the individual, the group, the organisation and even the country. It has been established that there are problems in the use of terminology: Too much of the same has been said and research is referring to the same concept using different definitions and jargon. Perhaps this lack of clarity is one of the trademarks of transition but again this myriad of work has commonalities which have probably evolved in these ways because of the type of funding and research initiatives developing at the same time but lead by different educational institutions. There also seems to have been a development in the literature as evidenced by the work of Evans and Furlong (1997). They maintain that in the 1960’s transitions were “linear” and young people were placed in jobs where it was believed that macro context, that is society needed them the most. In the 1970’s, a shift to post-Fordist structures was experienced and government-designed pathways emerged. For the 1980’s, Evans and Furlong (1997) use the metaphor of the school-to-work transition process to denote that personal discretion had to be used not only with regard to what job was to be taken up but also how and when it

was to be taken up. Therefore the transition from school to work could no longer be seen as a simple trajectory but rather as a more laboured effort concerning the individual, the market and the government. The fourth metaphor for Evans and Furlong (1997) for the 1990's is "navigation" to portray how people took action towards their own aims and targets. Individuals "navigated" through the transition process with raised expectations of choice. For Spiteri and DeGiovanni (2009), students following health and social care courses at MCAST deemed that the latter offered them a choice because they themselves chose to do so against other options in life. This research pointed to another issue which was largely ignored in other literature. The participants denoted that their future depends very much on them as being the pioneers in the field of qualified personnel working and operating the newly established Health and Social Care field in Malta. The authors thereby propose an additional metaphor in that these students engaged in a process of "influential navigation". They are influential because they are not passive recipients of the services of MCAST undergoing a transition to the labour market but they see themselves as an important influential factor of their own and in the transition of others both for the present and the future.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has been divided into two major parts. The first part has dealt with literature which supports existing literature on transition. The student as an individual person has been the major focus of this section as have the impact of curricula, choice possibilities, habitus, horizons for action, vocational habitus and communities of practice on the life of the student in transition. The second part of this chapter has then focused on what literature has to say about the experience of transition itself. This was divided into three different sections namely the macro level which dealt with institutional or context-specific transitions as well as social and cultural transitions in response to structural change; the

meso level which focused on the influence of transitions on the development of expertise as well as on other typologies; and the micro level which concentrated on transition as being a lifelong event as well as different transitional pathways. This section has also pointed out that transitions are increasingly being portrayed as phenomena which are to be contended with at individual level. In the next chapter, I will focus on the methodology of my research.

Chapter 4

The Research Methodology

4.0 Introduction

In the last chapter I presented an overview of the literature underpinning the understanding of the transitions of students as they move from compulsory to further education (FE). The review examines how the individual student is affected and in turn affects the family, school and work as well as leisure. These transition types also occur in specific ways according to transition regimes as described in the previous chapter. Students undergo change and in turn have the potential to influence the change of other individuals, educational/work structures, leisure trends and family attitudes. Although students may have different experiences, it is expected that there will also be some similarities. For instance all of the students come from the northern part of Malta and have attended the same secondary school but the ways in which they chose to proceed with FE and the ways in which they were influenced may result in the uptake of different pathways for each.

In order to understand the transitive experiences of these students, I have interviewed these students over a four year period, taking each student as an individual case study. Transitions refer to the way that these students cope with changes which are imposed or wanted or both. This change involves moving away from the familiar and finding new ways of dealing with new demands. The transition which is under analysis here involves inter-relations between individuals and their family as well as their outside world which involves their peers and also work/educational structures.

In this chapter, I explore the research paradigm within which I locate my research. I also provide details of the fieldwork, including my pilot study and first round of interviews since they provided the ground work for developing the questions for the interviews which

were carried out in the later stages. I will also discuss the ethical issues involved in carrying out this research as well as my own role as the researcher in the whole process. Finally, I will then explain how I have analysed the data which I collected and the way in which themes for analysis have been developed.

4.1 Locating my research

Research paradigms are basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). The paradigm represents a world view that defines the nature of the “world” (ontology), the knower's place in it (epistemology), and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts established by a particular data gathering and analysis procedure (methodology). The ontological question asks about the form and nature of reality: How things really are and how they really work. The epistemological question deals with the nature of the relationship between the knower or would be knower, in this case myself as the researcher as well as the readers of this work, and what can be known. However, what arises out of this relationship depends wholly on the type of ontological definition. The methodological question deals with the procedure in finding out whatever is believed can be known. This final assertion depends on the answers already given to ontology and epistemology and then just not any methodology is appropriate.

This research is located within an interpretivist tradition because of the acknowledgement of “multiple realities” (Zinkel, 1979). Knowledge, as apprehended by different people, does not result in one reality, which is shared by a collective understanding. Rather, each individual even if situated in the same scenario and in the same circumstances, would not construct the same reality. This apriori assumption purports that

the students taking part in my study have a mind of their own and they interpret and talk about their own reality each of which is considered to be important and valid.

My role as the researcher is to find out and discuss these different realities whilst acknowledging another reality which is my own. The ways in which I will elicit similarities and differences in the realities of these students will be my own construction and my choice of excerpts and interpretation of facts will be a reflection of my own reality. The reader of this work shall also have an input and also the opportunity to agree or not with the researcher's point of view.

Although the methodology used shall be described in greater detail later on in this chapter, a brief introduction shall be given here. The data was collected by means of unstructured interviews at different points in the students' lives as they moved from compulsory to further education or full-time employment. Individual rather than group interviews allowed for the assertion of the students' different realities and my own reality on equal grounds. Wragg (2002) mentions that in-depth semi-structured interviewers roam freely and require great skill and they are often, although not always, used by researchers working in an interpretive paradigm.

Lather (2006) maintains that in the interpretivist paradigm, reality is subjective and constructed. There are many "truths" which are shared in communicative transactions. The discourse is dialogic and is in a position to create reality as it seeks to understand "the rules of the game". It is different to critical theory in that it does not concern itself in criticizing the realities or their origins and it assumes that somewhere there is the existence of multiple truth. Bryman (2004) and Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005) state that interpretivism is

about understanding rather than explaining human behaviour. Emphasis is given to the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) state that the interpretive paradigm is concerned with the individual and in understanding the subjective world of human experience. The authors cite Habermas (1984) and Giddens (1976) who speak about the “double hermeneutic” where people strive to interpret and operate in an already interpreted world. Efforts are made to get inside the person and understand him from within, whilst the imposition of external form and structure is resisted, since this reflects the viewpoint of the researcher as opposed to that of the actor, who is directly involved. Furthermore, these authors maintain that interpretive studies focus either on action or on behaviour with meaning in that it is intentional and future-oriented. In a sense it may be deemed to be agentic in nature. However, these actions are meaningful in so far as the researcher is able to ascertain the intentions of the actors to share their experiences. Thus, knowledge emanates from the participant individuals and their interpretations of the world around them. The theory emerges from this data and arises from particular situations. Theory becomes sets of meanings which yield insight and understanding of people’s behaviour. These theories are likely to be as diverse as the sets of human meanings and understandings that they are to explain. In contrast to the normative way of theorizing, the interpretive perspective allows multifaceted images of human behaviour as varied as the situations and contexts supporting them.

Scott and Morrison (2006) state that in interpretivism the researcher is concerned with re-describing or re-constructing accounts of reality into social scientific explanations of social phenomena. Questions arise here whether it would be appropriate to redress these social phenomena in a different language and whether this different language immediately

distorts what it is trying to redescribe. Such a position recognises a degree of reflexivity that implies an awareness of the researcher's assumptions and positions and the way these have underpinned understanding of the topic (Karousou, 2009). My authorship in this study will not place me as an outsider but my own experiences and tacit knowledge of systems and phenomena will work together to round up the arguments for the study. However, Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) state that this is an arduous task as the researcher's agenda is not the young people's agenda and *"entering other people's lives and representing their stories is far more complex than many assume."* (Larson, 1997: 469 in Ball et al., 2006: 19). There is a fine and difficult balance to be sought between abstract interpretation and conceptualisation and the retention of authentic meanings. Ball and his colleagues (2000) state that they had differences between the way each of them interpreted the data and each had different sorts of emotional responses to them. Their interpretations and understanding were informed by personal knowledge of and relationships with these young people. This influence of personal knowledge and relationship also holds true to my study. However, the interpretations are entirely the author's own doing.

4.2 Research Ethics

Prior to commencing my field work, relevant permission from the Education Directorate, Malta was obtained (see Appendix III). This followed the guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) and the ethics committee of the School of Education at the University of Nottingham. The process of also having this research approved by the University of Nottingham School of Education ethics committee meant that I was made aware of my responsibilities in terms of ensuring that the research participants were protected from stress, that the material discussed remained confidential and that they had the right to withdraw at any point during the study. Owing to the fact that

the participants were under age at the commencement of the study, parental informed consent was sought.

Informed consent was given great importance throughout the study. It entailed informing the research subjects about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project. It further involved obtaining the voluntary participation for the subject, with the right to withdraw from the study at any time, thus avoiding potential undue influence and coercion (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) also points out that the principle of informed consent is not without problems in practice. As in the case of the initial part of my research involving adolescents attending secondary school, the question arises as to who should give the consent; the adolescents themselves? Their teachers? The head teacher or the parents? In my case permission from the Assistant Director for School Research within the Education Directorate was sought (Appendix III). The letter issued by the Education Directorate was then endorsed by the head of school who gave her permission for the study to be carried out. The school assistant head contacted potential participants and gave them a consent form which had to be signed by their parents if they were interested in participating in the study. During the first interview the consent form was read through to each and every participant and they were each invited to say whether they were willing to participate in the research.

Another issue relating to informed consent which also pertains to my study is the issue of quantity and incidence of information. Providing information about a study involves a careful balance between detailed over information and leaving out aspects of the design that may be significant to the subjects.

The issue of informed consent also changed during the study owing to my change in role over the four years that it was being carried out. In the initial stages of the study, I was working in a unit which was separate to each Institute at MCAST and this provided the participants with privacy and some distance. Although this remained true for some of the participants, three of them then saw me as a figure of authority within the institute they attended. This entailed explaining that whatever they said during interviews would affect their academic results in any way. Although the influence on academic performance was unlikely owing to the fact that I never taught these students, being the deputy director and subsequently director of the institute could result in me having the final say over disputed marks. In the case of such incidence, students were informed that this issue would be immediately referred to another senior official, namely the Deputy Principal who had no knowledge about the personal lives of these students and about the subject of the study.

Another important issue is that of anonymity. The names of the students taking part in the study were changed. Tapes and transcripts were kept in a secure place and the amount of data which would be used was shared with them in each subsequent interview. They were always told that they could read transcripts whenever they wished and they were able to change anything they were unhappy about. They were in fact asked to see the transcript and to comment on the way in which they had changed (if they did). Murphy and Dingwall (2003) citing Frake (1964); Lincoln and Guba (1985); Guba (1981); Sandelowski (1986); Walker (1989) state that this has multiple terms in the research arena namely respondent validation, host recognition, or member checking as a means of verifying the findings of qualitative research studies. When member checking is incorporated in the research process it can serve to reduce error as it offers an additional source of data since it can stimulate a reworking of the analysis (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003). However, in my research, students were not asked to comment on the analysis but on the way they

commented about the issues. Therefore, the outcomes of interpretation are my own views and constructions arise out of my own viewpoint. These interpretations may be constructed differently by different people as there is not one representation of truth and interpretation, as researchers operate within a particular context (Karousou, 2009). The validity of the data collected does not necessarily reflect the reality of the participants as the constructed reality is influenced by subjectivity, role of the researcher and the researcher. As Murphy and Dingwall (2003: 190) put it *“a range of different representations of the same phenomenon, which are potentially both legitimate and true, are possible.”* Bloor (1983: 157) in Murphy and Dingwall (2003: 187) indicates that member checks can only ultimately represent a *“legitimate elaboration and systematization of the member’s account.”*

Another important factor influencing the validity of my research is that of reflexivity which is the sensitivity to the way in which the researcher’s presence contributes to the data collected and how her assumptions shape the data analysis (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003). This undoubtedly has links to my role within the college (which was discussed in relation to informed consent) in addition to other personal characteristics such as my gender, age and type of occupation. A degree of distance from the research process is fundamental to reflexivity and my role in administration at work as well as regular discussions with my supervisors has helped to achieve this.

Finally Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) state that in their work there was a complex set of ethical issues to face which were not limited to the ethics of representation just discussed in this section. The more the young people trust the researcher(s), the more frank they tend to become about their life and boundaries. Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000: 20) state that some of these behaviours were *“technically illegal or potentially dangerous”*. Although I have not faced such extreme situations, I have, in the process, after each

interview given advice and provided information when this seemed appropriate. However, I concur with Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000), that the “right” thing to do was not always clear. In issues of significant personal difficulties, I have always recommended that the students should see the college counsellor.

4.3 Rationale for My Research Approach

In section 4.2 I have looked into the ethical issues which have surrounded my research journey. Although some of them arose due to circumstances which changed such as my own career pathway as well as the course pathway of the participants, most ethical issues emanate from the paradigmatic position chosen for this research.

Hence, the rationale or choice is based on the chosen epistemology and methodology discussed in section 4.2 and is strongly based on the research themes discussed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, the different pathways the students chose have all had the same starting point since they all attended the same secondary school (see section 4.8.1). For this reason, a qualitative approach, similar to the one adopted by Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) was deemed appropriate. In the initial stages, the approach was structured since the participants attended the same setting. Nevertheless as the research developed and the participants moved on, the approach was less structured and more open ended allowing them to talk about what interested them, introducing issues which I relatively ignored in the initial phases.

As I explored these experiences in the various FE and work contexts, I could see how these young people were dealing with their day-to-day roles as students, as student workers and also as workers. The influence of changes in structure and also of social networks such as the family were part of the process in the foreground for its importance

and at the background because family members were never present during the actual interviews. The qualitative approach that I have chosen enabled me to focus on the transitive nature of these unique experiences whilst affording me the flexibility to adapt approaches during the research process. Vis, (2008:1) states that qualitative research tends to support a process of understanding that involves a continual development. This process of understanding requires shifts and changes as new experiences emerge.

The researcher and the participant are part of a unique interaction that shapes and informs understanding which involves the practice of interpretation.

(Vis, 2008:1)

Le Compte and Preissle (1994: 1) indicate that Erickson prefers the term interpretive to qualitative. For Erickson the basic validity criterion is the immediate and local meanings of actions as these are then defined from the actors' point of view. For Erickson, qualitative research focuses in interpreting human meaning in social life and must be informed by phenomenological approaches. Hence phenomenology as a qualitative approach is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual. (Lester, 1999: 1). Phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasise the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. For this research I have adopted a phenomenological approach because it is deemed to be powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions and cutting through the clutter of assumptions and conventional wisdom (Lester, 1999). Initially phenomenological research as intended by Husserl sought essentially to describe rather than to explain and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses of preconceptions (Husserl, 1970 in Lester, 1999:1). In my research I tend to adhere to a more recent development (Lester, 1999) of this approach where the possibility of starting without preconceptions or bias, the importance of making clear how interpretations and meanings

have been placed in findings, as well as making myself as the researcher visible in the research process as an interested and subjective actor are clearly acknowledged. In fact Benner (1994: 103) in Vis (2008: 10) clearly portrays this as follows:

Learning the skills of interpretive phenomenology comes much more easily once the ontological concerns are recovered and the researcher is able to shift from questions about what it is to know (epistemology) to questions about why and how we “know” some things and not others and what constitutes our knowing (ontology). The dialogical process of learning to create, understand, and interpret texts begins with preexisting abilities to understand world, read texts for meaning and extend those everyday capacities with rigor and attentiveness to interpretive research.

Holstein and Gubrium (1998: 139) cite Schutz (1962; 1964; 1967; 1970) in that he purports that an individual approaches the life world with a stock of knowledge composed of common sense constructs and categories that are social in origin. This stock of knowledge is then applied to aspects of experience making them meaningful. Stocks of knowledge are resources with which persons interpret experience, grasp intentions and motivations of others, achieve intersubjective understandings and coordinate actions. The process under examination, namely students' transitions is somewhat fluid in nature and is dependent on a variety of issues. The various interactions and experiences the students talked about implied a perceived change in themselves and in the ways in which they positioned themselves in their pathway of choice.

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research will thus help me to focus on the following research questions:

1. What can we discover about the experiences that shape transition for 15-18 year old Maltese students?
2. What can be discovered about factors that influence transitions from Compulsory Education to Further Education (FE) in Malta?

3. How do selected Maltese students at this age view College life and other aspects of life?

These research questions draw upon my review of literature and my perceptions of this transitive process. The meaning ascribed to this experience of transition is mainly covered by the first and second questions. Issues about “anticipatory transition” such as the way in which the interviewees prepared during their final year of secondary education as well as the ways in which they dealt with the outcomes of their performance in examinations will be delved into. These, amongst issues related to perceptions of post-compulsory institutions will be explored. Hence students would also be in position to identify the key themes related to “anticipatory transition”. Furthermore, notions of “personal change” and the extent to which this has occurred, as well as the degrees in which the experiences at the secondary school, the further education institution they are attending and/or work have facilitated this change. Particular experiences elicited in the second question shall serve as examples to make the picture more complete. Students shall be asked to relate particular experiences at work, at college or in places which they would attend to further exemplify what they have been through. The aim of this question is that if they are relating these experiences, then this might mean that these are the most important to them.

In the third question, importance to the College/Work life balance shall be explored. It is of interest to me to note whether these interviewees view work/college and other aspects of their life as being separate. It would also be interesting to see whether their life outside college or work is influenced by what is going on at work in terms of the family, friendship, cliques, hobbies, part-time work and other interests. It would be worthy to note whether their thoughts about college and work which are their full-time commitments spill over to the periods in which they are at home and vice-versa.

By means of these research questions I also aim to find out whether the way in which transition and concepts informing transition can help in understanding the experiences of these Maltese students. Here I intend to see whether these concepts and the way they are defined could be adapted to the local scene and whether modifications to them or new concepts need to be developed.

4.4 Using Case Studies

In this chapter I have outlined the way I will approach my research in that it will be interpretivist and phenomenological. This will enable me to acknowledge the existence of “multiple realities” and also to ascribe and acknowledge individuality in the pathways of the participants. Consequently, I have placed the experiences of these students within a case study framework which aims to unravel the nature of their interactions, their individual perceptions and the influence of social networks, school, work and leisure on this transition. Most importantly, a case study framework is student-centred and aims to give a voice to the student in this process. Although there may be some degree of similarity in the transitive experience, it is envisaged that the pathway undertaken would be more individualistic as the transactions taking place are unlikely to be with the same entities. Students attend different work places, have different leisure interests, different friends and different families. Moreover none of them are following the same course of studies. This is not to say that students operate in isolation. However, even though the study deals with life after compulsory education, there is little in common between the students themselves save for the fact that they attended the same secondary school and intended to further their studies at MCAST.

Kemmis (1980) in Stake (1998) maintains that the concept of case remains subject to debate and the term study is ambiguous. In fact different authors define case studies in different ways (Stake, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1984). Stake (1998) maintains that a case

study is both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning. The more the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system, the greater the usefulness of the epistemological rationale behind the choice. The case studies in this research may be termed “intrinsic case studies” in that I am interested in understanding how each student has understood the experience of transition. They may also be termed “instrumental case studies” because they will be examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory. Furthermore, the work is a “collective case study” because the instrumental study is extended into several cases which may be *“similar, dissimilar, redundant and variety each having voice”* (Stake, 1998: 89). Although Stake (1998) describes the three types of case studies in an individualistic manner, he also purports that in practice this is highly improbable and that the distinction is heuristic in nature. Of particular relevance however is the definition given by Merriam (1988) for interpretative types of case studies which are concerned with developing conceptual categories inductively in order to examine initial assumptions.

Nevertheless, the unit of analysis in this study is the student and this has strong implications for the design of the case study as depicted in the discussion of Stake’s three types. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:322) in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2005) suggest that case studies are in fact useful when the researcher has little control over the unfolding of the events and that it has several hallmarks pertaining to this study amongst which are (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:317): The blending of the events and their analysis; the focus on the individual and the effort made in seeking to understand the participants’ perception of events. These hallmarks integrally involve the researcher and highlight the events that are relevant to the case.

Hence the case study allows the researcher to interpret and make connections as well as establish underlying relationships between different facets of the case with the influence of the FE/work setting, the social network and past experiences. It is a bounded entity which may be further constricted by my interpretation and the methods which I have selected for bringing this knowledge to the surface. The unit of analysis is the individual student with her experience of transition between educational/work institutions and the influence of other issues in the process.

This section has thus looked at how my understanding of a case study will inform its use for this study. The unit of analysis as the student in the transitive process has been identified and linked to the aims of this research. The specificity of this is vital because it places the research into a context and provides for a discussion of its contribution and limitations. Having established how these case studies form the basic unit for my research, in the next section I will now describe the method I have used to collect these experiences.

4.5 The Research Method: The Use of Interviews for Data Collection

In this section I will discuss the different types of interviews and justify the selection of using semi-structured and unstructured interviews at different points throughout the research process.

There are several types of Interviews as explained by Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2005) who cite a myriad of authors (Le Compte and Preissle, 1993; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Oppenheim, 1992; Patton, 1980). Murphy and Dingwall (2003: 77) state that the proliferation of typologies reflects their limited usefulness and it is more helpful to think of qualitative interviews as ranging along a continuum in terms of the degree of control the researcher seeks to exert over the content and structure of the

encounter. Thus, rather than specifically pinpointing to the different types, for this study I view the scenario along the continua discussed by Kvale (1996). Interviews vary in the degree of “structure”, from well-organized interviews that follow a sequence of standard question formulations, to open interviews where specific themes are in focus but without a pre-determined sequence and formulation of questions. Interviews also differ in their “openness of purpose” where the interviewer can explain the purpose and pose direct questions from the start or can adopt a roundabout approach with indirect questions in the concluding part of the interview. Furthermore, interviews can differ in their emphasis on “exploration versus hypothesis testing” in that the researcher may have already established hypotheses and is attempting to confirm or discredit them or is just attempting to getting to know a field. Interviews also vary along their degree of “descriptive purpose” or “interpretative purpose” depending on whether a description of experiences is sought or whether clarifications and interpretations of these descriptions are occurring with the subject. The fifth and final continuum is the “intellectual-emotional dimension” and this might range from a rational logical discourse between interviewer and subject who analytically clarify conceptions of the issues, to the interviewer attempting to get spontaneous and emotional descriptions of and reactions to a topic. Murphy and Dingwall (2003: 77) assert that the decision as to where to interviews should be located in a particular research study should be guided by the research questions being asked and the current state of knowledge of the field in question. If the issues are being explored in the context of a significant body of existing knowledge, then a more structured approach is appropriate as the researcher identifies similarities and differences whilst a more open approach is recommendable where there is little previous literature.

Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) mention that the interviews conducted when the young people were still at school were more prescriptive than the later ones. This holds true

for this study as in the pilot interview I was still defining both content and coverage of issues in order for me to obtain basic information such demographics which included detailed information about the family structure which was factual. Thus the initial part of the first interview was somewhat structured and factual in nature. Furthermore, the agenda I presented to them in this interview portrayed students as having very little to say particularly in the first part. To put what Murphy and Dingwall (2003) say into the context of this research, the initial approach of using a semi-structured interview served the comparison of the status quo in Malta to the issues discussed in the foreign literature. Once the subtleties were teased out, a more open approach to unravel the issues pertaining both to the Maltese context and to the individual cases was used. Thus, the later interviews were more open-ended and the vast majority of the participants opened up and seemed more at ease. Open-ended unstructured interviews allowed me to follow up issues and to word questions in such a way as put the informant more at ease and to elicit more detail on certain issues. Building trust with the informants, allowed me to approach sensitive topics such as family dynamics and relationships with teachers and friends. Furthermore, as Holstein and Gubrium (2002: 120) purport, *“meaning is constituted at the nexus of the hows and the whats of experience, by way of interpretive practice – the procedures and resources used to apprehend, organize and represent reality”*. Interviews are thus a form of interpretive practice involving respondent and interviewer as they articulate ingoing interpretive structures, resources and orientations. The respondent is no longer a repository of opinions and reasons but a productive source of knowledge. Within the interview itself, the subject is explored rationally and emotionally, in combination or otherwise in relation to the dynamics of the interview and the broader research purpose. Hence viewed in this way, the interview and its participants are constantly developing. In relation to my research, this development occurred in some interviews more than in others but across all interviews there was a “process”.

Interviews were the chosen method because activity by the informants did not always occur in locations which were accessible to me. Their talk about leisure activities, work and family would need to be observed in a variety of contexts which would have been inaccessible or difficult to access without causing disruptions in the informants' lives. Each participant was thus interviewed three times (including the pilot interview) with each session lasting one or two hours. Moreover one would note that interviews were the chosen medium because it was envisaged that some of the participants would find it very difficult to maintain learning diaries or journals owing to a low level of literacy and the kind of commitment that this entails. Interviews allowed me as the researcher to build a relationship with the participants over the years in which the study was carried out and it seemed a natural choice owing to my studies and training in interpersonal skills. Some of the participants attended the same institute in which I worked and others attended institutes which were only a few metres away. This enabled me to keep close contact with the majority of the participants who felt that I was a point of reference to them throughout their studies.

In this section I have explored the choice of interviews as the medium for data collection in this study. The types of interviews available were briefly described using a range of continua. These continua served as a background to defining the types of interviews which were explored in relation to the development of the research. The work of Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) has exemplified the developmental nature of the use of interviews in similar research. In the next section I will be describing the use of the pilot study in this research.

4.6 The Pilot Study

After having described the use of interviews in this research, I will now discuss the use of the pilot study and its contribution to the development of this work.

Conducting the pilot study was helpful in clarifying my understanding on the key issues forming part of this research. The pilot study entailed the use of semi-structured interviews with the purpose of collating demographic data and of asking questions about the ways in which the informants were preparing for the transition into further education. These semi-structured interviews (questions found in appendix IV) were held over a week at the secondary school. Once the necessary arrangements for access had been made, the assistant head and myself drafted a schedule to hold these interviews. This was a laborious task because I had purposely selected March, the last month of the school year, as in April the MATSEC examination session would commence. Hence some of the students were remaining at home to study rather than attending school.

Out of the ten recruited informants, I managed to interview nine. Each interview lasted for about sixty to ninety minutes. The material which was transcribed from these interviews was then grouped into themes as follows:

- Family background and influence
- Gender Expectations
- Perceptions on Junior College, University, Higher Secondary and MCAST
- Status as a learner
- Status of courses which could be chosen
- Perceptions of teachers
- Influence of friends
- Perceptions on working part-time.

The themes from the pilot study helped me to make initial comparisons to the available literature, particularly the work by Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000). The research

questions which were outlined in section 4.3 were thus refined into interview questions (see Appendix II). The themes were also refined into main themes and subthemes.

The pilot study also served other purposes. The first is that of introducing myself as the researcher to the informants and establishing whether their participation would provide enough material for the study. Another purpose was that of refreshing my skills as an interviewer. Kvale (1996: 147) in fact mentions that learning to become an interviewer takes place through interviewing as practice remains the main road to mastering the craft. He in fact states that: *“Conducting several pilot interviews before the actual project interviews will increase his or her ability to create safe and stimulating interactions.”*

Although going through the pilot study was time consuming, it also served to raise some interesting questions that needed consideration prior to the carrying out of the research. These questions referred to the research paradigm for the study, the refinement of the research questions, my role as the researcher, techniques in data collection, analysis of the data and its interpretation.

4.7 Research Settings and Participants

After having discussed the pilot study in the previous section, I will now discuss the research settings and the participants involved. Reasons for their selection as well as how access to the sites was granted and the limitations beyond the scope of this research shall also be discussed.

The selection of Sir Adrian Dingli Junior Lyceum was purely one of convenience since I had attended that school myself. Nevertheless it was still a conscious choice because of the fact that it is a Junior Lyceum and is neither the oldest nor the newest of the

lot. However, it was only the pilot interview that was carried out in this school. The other interviews were carried out in an office at MCAST or at the participants' workplace. The selection of MCAST and of the work settings arose out of the students' choices.

The selection of the participants was not my doing. I explained to the school that I needed to interview students who were interested in attending MCAST after finishing their fifth form and they gave me a list of interested subjects who wanted to participate. I was told that out of the list there were five who came from difficult social backgrounds. Initially ten informants were recruited but one of them never turned up for an interview and another one could not be traced for the second interview. Following the second interview, another participant dropped out. Therefore this longitudinal study commenced with ten participants and terminated with seven. Each of the names of the students was changed in order to protect their anonymity.

Prior to discussing my role in this research it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The main shortcoming was that two students dropped out in the initial phase of the research and this might have influenced the way the themes developed and the decisions following that pertaining to the formation of this research. The third student dropped out after the second interview and given the way her life developed, her contribution could have impinged on the final development of the themes for analysis.

There were considerable delays in the process of the research due to the academic calendar at MCAST. Whenever possible, I tried to interview all the students within the same time period but this was not always possible due to work placements or to courses which had started very late in the year. More often than not, my availability owing to work commitments rested on leave periods which had to be taken during Easter, Christmas and

Summer Recess. This was when the students were not available at the college making the interview schedules very difficult to manage.

4.7.1 Background Information of all the Participants

In this part of the chapter I will provide some factual information about each of the participants, using fictitious names, based in data gathered in the initial parts of the interviews. The introductory part of each interview was set to attain this factual data which was deemed “easy” for the participants to answer but at the same time served to locate the origins of the experience of each participant as well as to authenticate them as individuals with their unique profile. The information included the presence of parents and their occupation if any, the number of siblings within the family, their basic career intention, the number of ordinary levels obtained on completion of compulsory schooling and their present course of studies or occupation.

Ariana

Ariana lives at St. Julians. She seems to be very happy and settled but is somehow a little bit shy. She has a younger sister who goes to the same secondary school. Her parents did not pursue their studies. Her mum used to work in a supermarket whilst her father works as a taxi driver. She states that although her parents did not study they are doing their utmost to support her and to encourage her to continue. Ariana likes to chat on her PC using the MSN programme and to dance. She used to go to the Zghazagh Azzjoni Kattolika (ZAK) club (Youth Catholic Group) but she does not any longer and during the first interview had been dating her boyfriend for seven weeks. Nevertheless, this relationship had stopped by the time the second interview was performed as she had started dating a guy in her same class. Ariana always intended to pursue a career in IT and she started her BTEC First Diploma at a private training provider contracted by MCAST. Ariana was successful in

attaining this diploma and proceeded to National Diploma Level. She intended to further her studies to Higher National Diploma Level and eventually to read for the top-up Bachelor's degree.

Melissa

Melissa hails from Xemxija, a quaint village close to Mellieha in the Northern part of the Island. She is the third of four sisters the youngest of whom is 9 years old when the study was commenced. Her eldest sister has a form of disability and it seems that this occupies the majority of her mother's attention which she feels considerably. She thinks that her sister can be more independent and that she can also catch the bus like the others even though she might have some difficulties. Melissa's mother is a housewife who has no formal qualifications whilst her father installs car radios. Melissa is unsure whether he has attained any ordinary levels or not. She claims that her elder two sisters who work as salesgirls in an up market shopping plaza squabble a lot about clothes and that she quarrels a lot with her younger sister. Melissa had already been dating her boyfriend for a year at the time of the first interview and she had maintained this relationship for four years where she broke up with him a few weeks prior to the final interview. She proclaims that they are still friends and that he is also studying. Her boyfriend was always very supportive of her studies as well. Melissa still has a clique which she frequents at Bugibba Square. Melissa at first intended to undertake a career as a kindergarten assistant or child carer and having completed her Foundation Certificate in Care, at the time of the second interview was about to finish her First Diploma in Health and Social Care attaining a distinction. Melissa did not manage to achieve any Ordinary Level MATSEC passes when she finished her secondary education. However, she managed to enrol for the National Diploma in Health and Social Care.

Maria

Maria hails from Bugibba. Her mother is a nurse at Mount Carmel Mental Hospital and she has pursued courses at university and at the School of Art. Her father is a salesman but is educated to advanced levels. Her brother is head barman at the Dragonara Casino. Maria likes to draw, babysit and to sing. In her first interview she craved being enrolled in an important Maltese choir which her parents promised should she be successful in her MATSEC exams. Maria in fact managed to obtain two ordinary level passes and she started off at MCAST with the Foundation Certificate in Care. She stated that she does not attend the choir any longer. She was successful so she proceeded to BTEC First Diploma in Health and Social Care which she also attained. During the first interview, Maria was adamant in pursuing a career in child care but thought she would proceed to health and social care at the end of the second year after some work placements. Maria had a boyfriend during her fifth form which she stopped dating for a while but then resumed the relationship. At the time of the final interview she stated that she was getting engaged in a few months.

Doanna

Doanna lives in San Gwann with her parents and her sister who is both mentally and physically disabled and also bedridden. Her father is on the dole and her mother is a house wife who is involved in taking care of her sister. Doanna states that the family is in financial difficulty but initially she does not speak about her problems with others. Doanna owns a horse that is three years old and she loves to spend time taking care of him. Doanna sat for eight MATSEC exams and managed to obtain five which were more than enough to access the BTEC First Diploma in IT. However, she found programming boring and the climate difficult as she did not make any friends. Therefore, she dropped out and enrolled for the City and Guilds Diploma in Hairdressing. Doanna is somewhat shy and reserved and her appearance changed drastically over the years in which the study was carried out. She became fond of body piercing and always wore black. The situation at home never changed

and her father still remained unemployed. However, Doanna is becoming more assertive and she argues considerably with her mother. Doanna states that her mother feels guilty because she does not give her enough attention. She herself started working at a supermarket as a cashier but then they shifted her to stacking and she had to quit because of back problems.

Christine

Christine hails from Mgarr and she is the youngest of three siblings. One of her brothers used to attend MCAST whilst the other one used to sell fruit and vegetables as this was part of an extended family business. However, they now set up their own business as electricians. Christine's mother also used to help in the fruit and vegetable business but she quit due to disagreement in the family. Her father works as a driver. Christine likes to read Maltese Novels in her free time and she used to play soccer for the Mgarr Football Club. She sat for ten ordinary levels and did quite well so she enrolled for the Accounting Technician's Course (AAT) which is a three year course. Christine is very much inclined to work in an office in the future. Christine found a lot of support from her family in order to continue with her studies and they provided her with financial support for private lessons and to go out. When interviewed the second time, Christine was commencing her third year of studies and she was quite successful up to this point. Initially Christine claimed that she never had a boyfriend and she enjoyed the company of her friends as they go clubbing. However, during the final interview, Christine related that she had just terminated a relationship in which she got very hurt. She also went through a difficult time with her family since both her father and brother were hospitalised and her grandfather passed away in the same year.

Kirsty

Kirsty lives in Ta' Giorni which is part of St. Julians. They are two siblings, namely herself and her brother who has a disability. Kirsty states that she argues a lot with her brother. Her mum is a housewife and her dad is a panel beater. Both of them did not further their studies after they finished school. Kirsty likes to dance and to go out with her friends. Very often she goes to the UK with her family to visit her aunt. She is allowed to go to Paceville during weekends and she likes to attend the best three clubs. Kirsty states that her family is very supportive. They paid for her private lessons in Maths and Physics. She sat for eleven MATSEC examinations and she passed nine of them. After finishing her fifth form, Kirsty found a cheese counter job at Park Towers Supermarket but she quit because she did not like it and felt she was not well paid. She applied for the BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development but she was not accepted because although she had the minimum entry requirements, other applicants had higher qualifications. She then decided to attend Higher Secondary where she repeated her MATSEC Ordinary levels in Maths and English which she then attained. She applied once again to go to Higher Secondary to take her Advanced Levels and would like to then proceed to University to read Psychology or Education if her grades are high enough. Nevertheless the third interview with Kirsty was never held because she refused to be interviewed. When contacting all the participants through facebook I realised that she had just given birth to a baby. The other participants who still kept a little bit in touch with her told me that she was now working at a fast food chain.

Daniela

Daniela lives at Mgarr. Her brother attended the Institute of Art and Design at MCAST but he did not finish the course and she stated that he is in fact unable to keep a steady job. She declared that she does not get along with her brother and the family takes it against him because of his unsteadiness. She states that her brother's unsteadiness bothers her.

Daniela likes to model and sing and she gives these activities quite a lot of importance in her life. She says that her family has a thriving retail business. Her mother finished her Advanced Levels whilst her father is a University Graduate. At the time of the first interview she states that she has a boyfriend who encourages her a lot and that she has been with him for two years. He works with Hal Mann which is a granite factory. Daniela sat for eleven MATSEC exams and during her fifth form she had no idea about what career path to take. In her second interview she told me that she attained some ordinary levels and had applied for the Foundation Certificate in Hairdressing but she stated that MCAST did not inform her about her aptitude test and so she never turned up. She got to know about the test from her friends when it was too late. In the meantime she found herself a job as a hairdressing assistant but the pay was very low and the work was very hard. She tried to attend evening classes to redo some of her MATSEC examinations but she failed to turn up for them as well. She then found herself a job in a mobile store and it was very satisfied and happy for a while. In her third and final interview, Daniela was working in one of the outlets that her family owns. She had just finished off with her boyfriend and she was re-establishing herself and focusing on her business.

Phoebe

Phoebe is an only child who lives in Bugibba. She is very close to her cousins who are her role models. One of them works with disabled people whilst the other attends University. Her mother is English and works as a cashier in a supermarket whilst her father is a salesman for Fiorucci, a firm selling cold cuts. Phoebe likes to sing and dance and she does so at home behind closed doors. She is used to going to the UK to visit her Grandma and she is very close to her. Her family is very supportive and they give her money to go out and to buy books. Phoebe had no boyfriend during her first interview. Phoebe attained nine MATSEC examinations and she found a summer job soon after she finished her fifth form. She ended

up keeping her summer job for about three years where she worked for “Things”, a chain store selling fashion accessories. She was quickly promoted to supervisor and shop manager at 17 years of age. After that she was employed at Jennyfer’s as a store manager. She might take up courses in shop window design and also explored the possibility of relocating to the UK.

This section has described the research settings which were chosen for the study and has also described the way in which the participants were recruited for the study. In the next section I will now discuss my role as the researcher.

4.8 Role of the Researcher

The previous section has covered the research settings and the recruitment of participants for this research. This section shall now look at the roles I adopted in this research

Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 3) view the qualitative researcher as “bricoleur”. The “bricoleur” produces a “bricolage” which is a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation. Thus the researcher-as-bricoleur uses tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials as are at hand (Becker, 1989 in Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

My role in the research was that of being a reflexive practitioner. Murphy and Dingwall (2003) state that this involves seeing research participants as purposively engaged in producing the activities we observe and the talk to which we listen. This requires me as the researcher to consider possible reasons why the participants behave as they do in the context of this research. Furthermore, as the researcher, I should also be aware of the intellectual and personal baggage that I bring to the interpretation of the data.

The “bricoleur” thus understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his/her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting. The bricoleur knows that science is power, for all research findings have political implications. There is no value-free science. The “bricoleur” also knows that researchers all tell stories about the worlds they have studied.

(Guba and Lincoln, 1998:4)

The way in which I have approached the whole research process is linked to the kind of learning and reflection that I have acquired from research projects in the past. This is also linked to my orientation as a researcher which has shifted to post-positivism when compared to previous experiences. The different roles that I have occupied at MCAST have also played a part in my role as a researcher in this study so much so that they had fuelled my initial interest in the study. Furthermore, throughout the research I shifted from outsider to insider for the participants. We were both more at ease in the final interviews and I was becoming a “friend.”

In this research I also have the role of a writer because I have not only carried out the field work and interpreted the findings but also needed to find ways to convey the messages to the readers of this study. Stake (1998: 95) states that knowledge of the case faces “hazardous passage” from writer to reader as the writer needs ways of “safeguarding the trip”. As the reading begins, a case would assume a place in the company of previously known cases and for the reader, the new case cannot be but some combination of cases already known. As the researcher, I cannot know the already-known cases and the peculiarities of the mind of my readers (Stake, 1998).

This section has dealt with my role as a researcher encompassing the various phases of this research. In the next section I will be dealing with the framework adopted for the analysis of my data.

4.9 Data Analysis or Explication of the Data

This section shall deal with the ways in which I analysed and interpreted the data acquired for this research. Groenwald (2004: 17) mentions that Hycner (1999) cautions that “analysis” has dangerous connotations for phenomenology. This is because analysis usually means breaking the whole into parts which therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon. On the other hand, “explication of the data” implies “*an investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole*” (Hycner, 1999: 161). With this perspective in mind as the author of this thesis, I tend to use the term analysis and to adopt an application of it in the way that Coffey and Atkinson (1996 in Groenwald, 2004: 17) define it. They regard analysis as the systematic procedures to identify essential features and relationships.

Analysis in this thesis followed distinct stages with each stage informing the subsequent data collection procedure as outlined in sections 4.6 and 4.7. After a round of interviews was completed, each interview underwent a verbatim transcription from which a grouping of categories emerged. The transcripts were then re-read and themes were elicited in response to the research questions I had raised for this research. This was done for each of the three rounds of interviews for a total of twenty-three interviews which accounts for the attrition of three participants at various stages of this research.

Miles and Huberman (1994:9) indicate that interpretive qualitative data analysis usually involves the following processes:

- Affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observations or interviews
- Noting reflections or other remarks in the margins

- Sorting and sifting through these materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences
- Isolating these patterns and processes, commonalities and differences and taking them out to the field in the next wave of data collection
- Gradually elaborating a small set of generalisations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database
- Confronting those generalisations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories

Hence Miles and Huberman (1994) show that data analysis and collection are not so far apart. In fact data analysis was an ongoing process starting from the initial interviews held for the pilot study and evolving throughout the whole research process. Crabtree and Miller (1992b) in Miller and Crabtree (1998) identified “four idealized analytic styles” and the approach I have used in my research closely resembles the Editing Analysis Style as represented in Figure 4.1 below:

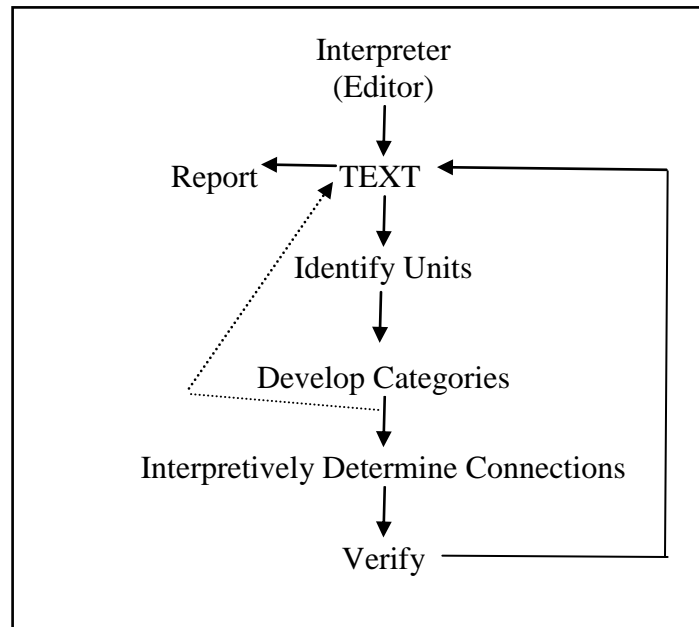


Figure 4.1: Diagrammatic Representation of the Editing Analysis Style.
Source: Crabtree and Miller (1992b) in Miller and Crabtree (1998: 303).

On analysing the emergent categories, I had to also consider the research questions which I had posed in the initial phases of my study. This brought a further development as what was gained from the raw data and what was elicited from the literature review were amalgamated into the final analytical themes and subthemes. Some of these themes pertain to only one participant whilst the other themes are shared by two or more. This would further permit the inclusion of what Murphy and Dingwall (2003) term as exotic and mundane events. Thus as I was interviewing the participants, a number of themes were starting to take shape. When I became more certain, I started to take some notes during the interviews. On listening to the tapes and on writing the verbatim transcripts, these themes became somewhat more definite and I was able to group them into themes and subthemes. With the help of N-Vivo I then finalized the theme families where the main difficulty I found was to place some of the quotes in one or more categories. I decided that this data could fit into one or more. At times quotes were separated to endorse different categories and at times the same quote was used to highlight aspects pertaining to different categories. This

served as much as possible the purpose of explicitation of the data (Hycner,1999) as outlined earlier on in the introduction of this section.

The separation of themes, subthemes and categories serves the purpose of helping the reader to make sense of the amount of data that was collected by putting it into understandable portions. The way I have decided that this should be done was according to the way that I made sense of the data and in the ways in which I saw this research project as evolving. This was so much so that the final theme was developed after the third interviews indicating that theme development was a process which evolved throughout the totality of this research.

To summarize, it is worth noting that I closely followed what Miles and Huberman (1994:9) prescribe in undergoing interpretive qualitative data analysis. I first started by affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observations or interviews. Using N-Vivo I then sorted and sifted through these materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences. The isolated patterns and processes, commonalities and differences shaped the basis of my questions for the subsequent phase of interviews. Finally, a small set of generalisations in the form of themes, subthemes and categories was formed and confronted with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories previously exposed in Chapter 3 which is the literature review.

Although the initial categories were devised manually, I then decided to use computer software, namely NVivo as the data was becoming too broad to manage. NVivo offered me the possibility of an initial visual overview of the categories and themes and as

the analysis of the data went on; the initial themes were refined, narrowed down and grouped together into themes and subthemes.

As discussed in Section 4.8, I also had to decide how to convey my findings and interpretations to the reader. I departed from organizing my writing according to each participant because this did not enable their comparison. Furthermore, the ultimate aim of this thesis was that of informing practitioners and policy makers about ways in which transition could be facilitated in order to decrease the amount of dropouts. Having the analysis organized in themes would help action to be targeted and specific programmes to be developed. However, contextualising each case individually was also useful and a profile on each of the eight participants in this chapter provides a context for my analysis. Smith (1998: 198) states that “...*heroes and heroines do not exist in isolation. Contexts exist in lives and context exists in writing lives*”. Karousou (2009) cites Denzin (2002) who declares that contextualisation locates the phenomenon being studied in the personal biographies and the social environments of the persons being studied. Apart from a contextual overview provided in Chapter 2 of this work, as a researcher I sought the importance of clarifying my views and the importance the context plays wherever this was deemed useful to the understanding of the phenomenon being discussed.

The final points which warrant discussion in my elaboration of data analysis for this research are those exposed by Murphy and Dingwall (2003). These authors state that it is impossible to include all the available and potentially relevant data collected in the course of a qualitative study. Therefore it is necessary to consider principles of selection for which they suggest three:

- The inclusion of both exotic and mundane events
- The inclusion of events with sufficient context to allow alternative interpretations

- The inclusion of negative or deviant cases where these exist.

In my work I have tried to adhere to these principles but the inclusion or otherwise always rests on my own personal inclinations.

4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented my methodology for this research. The ontological and epistemological underpinnings were considered and the way this research has been located have been discussed.

The research design adopted for this thesis was also discussed and it was argued that this was in line with the topic of my research since the design allowed for the flexibility inherent in students' transitions to further education and/or work. The use of case studies allowed this flexibility since it permitted their comparison in terms of similarities and differences with regard to the themes for analysis.

The pilot study served as an introduction to the field, to refine the research questions, to elicit possible themes for analysis and to polish up my skills as an interviewer. The ways in which different types of interviews were used throughout the study was also discussed. The selection of participants, their backgrounds and intentions as well as research settings were also provided and issues of access and limitations to the development of this research were explored. My role in the research process was considered as was the ways in which I have analysed my data. The use of NVivo, a computer software package and manual data analysis were discussed.

Having discussed the methodological framework of this study, I will now present the analysis and findings of my research.

Chapter 5

Analysis

5.0 Introduction

In Chapter 4, I presented the research methodology where ontological, epistemological and methodological frameworks for this study were described. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the findings from the experiences of all the participants of this study. Their experiences arise from the way in which they interacted with multiple factors in their life namely their social network which includes their friends and family, the educational institutions which they attend, their work as well as thoughts and intentions about their future. The use of individual student case studies has helped me to identify ways in which the participants coped with this transitory period and to explore other issues which were then mentioned by them during the interviews.

The research questions I posed for this thesis gave rise to a number of interview questions (see appendix II for the interview framework). The analysis was a process carried out each time data was collected through the interviews, where eight distinct themes were uncovered and fully explored as seen within this chapter. This chapter then concludes by proposing the “The Self in Transition Model” which takes into account the findings of the analysis of my research. As outlined in Chapter 4, the analysis of this work undertook a thematic rather than a case-study approach. Hence, it now seems appropriate to start off the chapter by briefly summarising the pathway of the participants by means of a table. In section 4.7.1 I already gave an in-depth description of the backgrounds and intentions of these participants. However, table 5.1 serves as a quick reference to identify the trajectories that these participants have undertaken between 2007 and 2010 which is the time period in which data for this research project was collected.

Name	Original Career Aspiration	MATSEC Exams Achieved	Course Applied For in 2007	Course Attended 2007-2008 at Post Compulsory Education	Course Attended 2008-2009 at Post Compulsory Education	Course Attended 2009-2010 at Post Compulsory Education
Ariana	Computer Programmer	4	BTEC First Diploma in Information Technology	BTEC First Diploma in Information Technology	BTEC National Diploma in Information Technology Year 1	BTEC National Diploma in Information Technology Year 2
Melissa	Kindergarten Assistant	0	MCAST Foundation Certificate in Care	MCAST Foundation Certificate in Care	BTEC First Diploma in Health and Social Care	BTEC National Diploma in Health and Social Care Year 1
Maria	Kindergarten Assistant	2	MCAST Foundation Certificate in Care	MCAST Foundation Certificate in Care	BTEC First Diploma in Health and Social Care	BTEC National Diploma in Health and Social Care Year 1
Christine	Secretary	10	Accounting Technician Course (AAT)	Accounting Technician Course (AAT) Year 1	Accounting Technician Course (AAT) Year 2	Accounting Technician Course (AAT) Year 3
Doanna	Website Designer	5	BTEC First Diploma in Information Technology	BTEC First Diploma in Information Technology	City and Guilds Diploma in Hairdressing Year 1	City and Guilds Diploma in Hairdressing Year 2
Kirsty	Kindergarten Assistant	9	BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development	Had enough entry requirements for the BTEC Course but was surpassed by other applicants in order of merit. She entered the Higher Secondary MATSEC "O" level Revision Course	Higher Secondary Matriculation Course	She refused the third interview but her ex school mates told me she is working in a fast food chain She had a baby.
Daniela	Hairdresser	0	Foundation Hairdressing	Missed aptitude test for Foundation Certificate in Hairdressing and was refused entry. Had worked as a shop assistant in mobile shop. Now she runs her own fashion outlet as part of the family business and is a part-time fashion model		
Phoebe	Several mentioned: hairdressing was the main original option	9	Never applied for a course – has been working as a shop assistant at Things since 2007 when she finished her MATSEC "O" levels Had changed her work to store manageress at Jennyfer's by the time we got to the third interview.			

Table 5.1: A Tabular form of Individual Paths undertaken by Participants of the study between 2007 and 2010

5.1 Analysis

The analysis of the interview data led to the identification of eight key themes. A variety of techniques was employed in order to extract the themes from the data. According to Ryan and Russell Bernard (2003) if the goal in the research is to generate as many themes as possible, the use of multiple techniques is commendable. For this research, the use of both “pawing” as well as “cutting and sorting” techniques were employed. “Pawing” or “ocular scan method” (Bernard in Ryan and Russell Bernard, 2003) refers to the process of looking through texts and highlighting key phrases. This was done in order to get a feel for the text and to read over it a number of times. Ryan and Russell Bernard (2003) state that “cutting and sorting” literally involves writing each quote on a card and then manually employing a pile sorting technique. What I did to develop the themes was a version of cutting and sorting at times using software namely ATLAS.ti and N-VIVO 8 to speed up the process. Nevertheless I then reverted back to the manual method of “cutting and sorting” since more time was actually taken to input the data within the software than in the actual analysis. Initially nine themes emerged but it was decided to drop the theme relating to leisure since it was not as solid as the other eight.

The first theme that emerged from the data compiled for this thesis deals with the individual changes that the participants experienced throughout the study. These changes were experienced in the different ways and to different extents. They also arose out of the various experiences that the participants encountered. One of the subthemes within the overall theme deals with issues about having male as well as new female class mates and how this has brought about a change in personality such as in the case of Ariana who has become more of an extrovert, or as in the case of Doanna, who as a result, decided to change her course of studies. Christine on the other hand states that

she has matured a lot on that she does not say whatever comes to her mind. This is brought about by her fear of the unknown in that she claims that she does not know her colleagues in class. Hence the second subtheme emerged as contrary to what is “known” which is portrayed in the first subtheme by Doanna and Ariana, Christine prepares herself for the “unknown” or for “what might be” by doing her own thinking twice. A third subtheme emerges in that participants also talked about how they learnt to prioritise. Learning to prioritise for Kirsty came about through the need for a different kind of friendship and for Maria changing by giving school more importance was an influence brought about by her friends. For Melissa giving priority came about by the change in assessment strategies since the MCAST system of assessment is more appealing to her. For Christine, prioritising came about after her realisation that without investing in her lectures and studies at MCAST, she would not earn good grades. Maria also learns to prioritise owing to her bank’s decline in lending her money to buy a car. On the other hand for Daniela, changing from full-time student to full-time worker brought about a change in her daily well-being. Her new responsibilities which are brought about by a new lifestyle through full time work is the subject of the fourth subtheme. For Daniela the responsibility in taking care of a business serves as a boost to her identity which was deemed to be negative when associated to the idea of being a student. The fifth and sixth subtheme emerge from the transcriptions of Doanna’s discourse. Doanna experiences change in two ways: The first change is brought about by her conscious effort to distantiate herself from her family both physically and also psychologically. Her psychological departure brings about a disclosure of her experiences to her friends at MCAST. Disclosure of her inner self is something which was neither permissible during secondary school nor within her family at home. This change also gives an impetus to the change she creates in her image which further reinforce her effort to move away from the conventional and the daily routine she was used to. Tattoos and piercing might

seem to be a very trivial change but for Doanna they each signify a different experience which reminds her that she is courageous and able to succeed. The data collected also evidences the experiences of work and the changes that this brought about on the participants of my study. The ways in which participants talk about their work experiences and how these brought about a perceived change in themselves gave rise to the final subtheme within this theme. In fact, for Melissa, the work placement influenced her preconceived ideas with regard to some client populations; Doanna changed in that she managed to overcome her shyness ever since she also changed her practice salon; Phoebe talks about a change in the questioning skills with clients. In its entirety, this theme shows evidence of individualisation (Beck, 1992) in that both inside and outside their family, participants slowly became agents of their livelihood. This livelihood is mediated by the market as well and their own biographical planning and organisation. There is evidence of liminality (Bettis, 1996) as the participants created interplay between the macro world and their own micro worlds.

The data collected for this thesis also sheds light on how the participants found their own learning status. This lead to the development of the second main theme which, on further analysis, gave rise to three different subthemes. Participants spoke about ways in which their secondary school gave messages about their status as learners and about the emphasis that is given to ordinary level examinations as being the most important benchmark in this respect. Christine for instance points out that it is futile thinking about what course to take because it all depends on the final examination results whilst Maria talks about the importance of the exams and about not feeling adequately prepared for them. Daniela feels helpless and almost unable to react to the situation. Experiences following the issue of examination results gave rise to a separate subtheme in that participants were coming to terms with the outcome of their

examination results and also preparing themselves for a new school and/or work opportunities. Daniela for example speaks about not being classified amongst the best students at the secondary school and about having a “damaged learner identity” whilst Christine talks about her success as the exam results further reinforced her status as a successful learner. For Doanna however, the outcomes of the ordinary level examination results do not really have an impact as the family scenario compels family members to direct their attention to other matters. Later on, once the participants started attending MCAST, changes in perceptions of learning status or otherwise were further developed through a comparison of the examination system at the secondary school and assessment through assignments at college.

The third theme centres around the experience of participants with regard to secondary school preparation programmes for transition and also the participants’ own way of preparing for this transition. Participants focused on issues in relation to the kind of information which was given to them by their school which seems to indicate that there are hidden and null curricula (Eisner, 1985) at play. Maltese Educators seem to be applying their own structure as past University of Malta students to their own students by implying that they should be aiming for the Junior College and University rather than opting for MCAST. To some teachers, MCAST seems to be a second class option reminiscent of the times when technical people were deemed to be less academically able. Melissa and Ariana specifically talk about the incident where MCAST was deliberately left out of the official school visits that were organised for fifth formers. Participants also speak about ways in which they were dissuaded from taking up certain subject options in that MCAST was portrayed as being the worst potential option. The way that participants described this gave rise to the development of a second subtheme. Daniela and Melissa in fact criticise the quality of information which was given to

students about MCAST. Moreover, the participants also talked about the lack of preparation that they had for the world of work and they defined this as a “leap into the dark”. The data giving rise to the third main theme thus points out that secondary schools tend to orient students towards an academic career whilst ignoring preparation and guidance for other career pathways that students may be inclined to follow.

In this study, participants also spoke about how they made their choices and about how being female oriented their choice. The first subtheme develops around Christine’s discourse since she is very resolute in her decision not to attend university since she intends to raise her own family with no intention of leaving children with their grandparents in order to pursue a career. For Christine investing so much in education would be a waste of time when she knows that she will eventually stay at home in order to raise her own kids. The data also contained nuances about the reputation carried by the available tertiary institutions and how this was also influential on the kinds of choices made by the participants. In fact, some establishments were not deemed to be of good quality and participants eliminated them as a choice in order not to waste their time. A further subtheme which emerged deals with the kind of physical or environmental ambience within these institutions and this was deemed to be important to the participants’ motivation to study. Choices also rested on the participants’ individual aptitudes and subject interests and also on how certain subject choices were denied to them throughout their secondary school studies. In retrospect, participants speak about them being happier in their studies and in their current scenarios should they have been allowed to follow the subjects they wanted to.

In this study a substantial amount of data focused on thoughts about teachers and lecturers giving insight on the ways in which these educators were perceived by

their students. The dearth of data collected about teachers highlights the importance that these individuals have in the life of students. Participants talk about the behaviour of some of their teachers and mainly describe them as being either dedicated or unprepared. Doanna and Christine emphasise the personal attention they got from their teachers whilst Maria talks about the difficulties that she had because she was not one of those who could be classified as well-behaved. Roles and responsibilities of teachers and students within the learning process were also described. Students talked about failing in subjects when this was essentially the teachers' fault. Daniela points out that her teachers did not prepare any lessons for her class because they preferred to chat with them since she belonged to one of the lower academic streams and was therefore by default less academically able than most of the other girls within the same cohort. She states that this class was always discriminated against and that her teachers did not expect that much from them as a group. Furthermore, participants also spoke about their own effort in the learning process in that the teachers' responsibility is bound by limitations should the student not prove to be an active learning participant. Maria in fact states that students should be responsible for following up what teachers had explained by studying at home. Apart from particular learning incidents, participants also spoke about the general school climate and how this impinged on their learning. Christine talks about the ways in which school structures create particular climates between teachers and students. She states that the climate at the secondary school was warmer because everything was carried out within one building block whilst at MCAST keeping closer contact with lecturers was harder. Moreover, lecturers at MCAST treated students as adults and participants felt that this was hard to adjust to at times.

Participants also spoke about personal life experiences giving rise to the insurgence and development of the sixth theme which I entitle "Myself, My Family, My

Friends". This theme focuses on the development of the participant's self as a separate individual in relationship to significant others. Here, the ways in which parents exerted vigilance and how this gradually diminished as the participants grew older is described and analysed. This is clearly highlighted by Ariana as more space to take her own decisions as well as more responsibility are gradually awarded to her over the years in which the study is carried out. Furthermore, the development of personal space was also an issue of significant importance for some of the participants and in one particular instance we see that a parent had problems in separating her own life from that of her daughter's. Within this theme, we also find that participants and their parents underwent role reversal since responsibility for the general well-being of the family of origin was also shouldered by some of the participants. The onus of the family support mechanisms were thus perhaps unexpectedly also incurred by these participants as in the case of Phoebe. This issue is not only seen with regard to family business concerns but also with regard to the personal problems faced by families as in Christine's case who prioritises in favour of family matters rather than her studies. For Christine's family, studies were not given top-most priority whilst the pressure to perform in her studies was a heavy burden that Christine still had to overcome. Within this theme, another subtheme emerged in that Doanna created alternative support mechanisms through friendship when she found no form of constructive support within her family of origin. Doanna also speaks about not having any reaction from her family in that it seems that she would like them to give her some sort of feedback which she never manages to attain. Such a pattern was directed both to personal life experiences and/or as a direct influence on the course of studies.

Participants also spoke about their experiences at work and how this helped them to find their own pathway for this transition. This data gave rise to the development

of a further theme which I entitle “(L)Earning a Living”. This theme developed through work as source of learning and as a means to earn a living. The link between what is learnt at college and whether this is supported or otherwise at work was explored and this was further evidenced by the need of having work placements which supported what was being learned in the classroom. The need to apply what was learned was highly emphasised by Ariana who was not given the opportunity to go on work placements as these are not officially organised by the MCAST Institute in which she attends. Some of the participants had the opportunity to work in family businesses and the need for being able to separate oneself from the family for work was highlighted by at least two of the participants namely Christine and Phoebe. However, Daniela prefers otherwise.

Learning about work and different employment conditions as well as the impact on quality of life and well-being was another area which was analysed in this section as experienced by both Daniela and Phoebe. Moreover, the role of placements in orienting the participants towards a particular career path was the subject of another subtheme as placements acted as work tasters, as intended by MCAST management. This helped the participants to take more informed choices with regard to their career path. In fact Melissa gave up on taking child care as an option owing to the fact possibilities to find work are limited and also because the studies involved were unclear. Maria’s expectations were also challenged as she realised that she did not have that much patience with children but she then had to take health studies because her grades were not good enough for the course. Part-time work was seen as a distraction to full-time studies and work was also seen as a source of physical hardship which oriented some of the participants to further their studies in order to delay employment and to ultimately attain better jobs. Finally as in the case of Doanna, finding a work opportunity on the other side of the island was also seen as an opportunity to make a fresh start away from the family.

Data gathered throughout the final interviews gave rise to the development of the final main theme attained through my analysis. This deals with how the experience of this transition prepared the participants for their immediate and remote futures. For some, most particularly in reference to their studies, what was in store for them was clear cut with a well-established route available for them to follow. This was evident mainly for Ariana, Christine and Doanna. For others, the future was not deemed to be a certain one as in the case of Phoebe whilst for others such as Melissa avoiding uncertainty was the determining factor in following a particular pathway over another. With regard to their remote future, most participants focused on their work in relation to their wishes with regards to whether they wanted to raise their own family.

The way in which the themes are presented in the chapter also reflect a journey which departs from the changes perceived within the individual self (Theme 1) to finding a learning status where the self is then compared amongst others (Theme 2). In Theme 3 we see how the individual participant prepares herself or receives preparation for what is to come in a wider sociospace which is relatively unknown whilst in Theme 4 we see the self making choices based on this preparation as well as on the perceived learning status. In Themes 5 and 6 the individual self contends with others individuals who are significant or perhaps less so, namely teachers, family and friends. Teachers seem to be more influential on subject choices rather than on choices which seem to be more personal. The nature of the discourse pertaining to subject choices is different to the issues elicited in relation to family and friends. Moreover, teachers are the target of heavy criticism as they are the front liners of the educational system or at least the authority representing the school in which the students are attending. In Theme 7 the individual self finds an alternative system for learning which is the workplace. The workplace also serves to further delineate and endorse the pathway that the individual

self has undertaken. Finally in Theme 8, the individual is once again self-reflexive and focuses on her own wishes for the future. The journey is thus a circular one which departs and ends with an intrapersonal reflection.

The presentation of my analysis is not unlike the introductory chapter presented by Hodkinson et al. (1996). Their presentation of the data garnered from the stakeholders refers to a cross case analysis of the inherent themes discussed by the young people themselves, their parents, their career teachers, employers, training providers and officials of the Training and Enterprise Councils. This was the method which I used to present the analysis of the data in this thesis. Although this might have diminished the complexity of the participants' lives (Hodkinson et al., 1996), I felt that this would have been the appropriate strategy given that I wanted to develop a model which would give an understanding of the self in transition. The presentation of themes, which made use of cross-case analysis for the entirety of my analysis, enabled me to elicit the factors which impinged on the self in transition. The work produced by Hodkinson et al. (1996) and Ball et al. (2000) did not aim to create a complex model as is represented in Figure 5.1 of this thesis, and although they utilised cross-case analysis, this was done with four or less than the total number of participants. In the Hodkinson et al. (1996) work, two chapters are devoted to individual participants. Although this might have seemed a more likely course of action for this thesis, it seemed difficult and also unfair on my part to group participants apriori to the actual analysis and I thought that the cross-case analysis would have been more conducive to the ultimate aim which was that of producing a working model.

As author of this thesis, I found it important to summarise the key findings of each analytical theme. These findings are found at the end of each section. The main themes together with their relevant subthemes are thus summarised in table 5.2 below:

	Theme	Subthemes
1	Individual Changes	Moving into co-educational settings
		Learning to think
		Learning to prioritise
		Taking on other responsibilities
		Changing by moving away from the family
		Creating a new personal image
		Taking on new roles
2	Finding A Learning Status	Ordinary-level examinations: Barriers or opportunities?
		Establishing a learning identity
		Comparing the old exams to the new assignments
3	Preparation for Further Education and/or Work	Perceived options for Junior Lyceum students
		Impressions of the available options
		Preparation for life outside school
4	Making Choices	Eliminating choices
		Ensuring a good time investment
		Choosing the right learning environment
		Aptitude
		Availability of subject choices
5	The Impact of Teachers on Students' Lives	Teachers' behaviour
		The teachers' effort
		Students' efforts in learning
		School climates
6	Myself, My Family, My Friends	Parental Intervention
		Creating personal space
		Giving and receiving support from the family
		Giving priority to family matters
		Support from friends
		Friends as enemies
7	(L)Earning a Living	Students' ways of linking classroom-based learning to work practices
		College-provided work placement experiences
		Working in the family business
		Learning about different types of jobs by working
		Using work as a personal learning space
		Work as a medium to learn about life
		The influence of college work placements on course choice
		Giving studies priority over work
8	Using What is learnt to Make Sense of my Future	A Clear Trajectory: Treading a well-established pathway
		An undefined future and unclear routes
		Refusing Uncertainty
		Choosing between potential family commitments and careers

Table 5.2: Emergent Themes and Subthemes

Having outlined the themes for my analysis whilst also providing a description in tabular format in Table 5.2, I will now introduce the next section. This theme which was the first one emerging from the collected data, focuses on the individual changes which the participants of the study experienced.

5.1.1 Individual Changes

The participant, acting as an individual, and the way that she assimilates feedback from the outside world resulting in personal change, shall be the key focus of this theme. Of particular interest is the link to the process of Individualisation (Beck, 1992) where individuals inside and outside the family become the agents of their livelihood, mediated by the market as well as their own biographical planning and organisation. Similarly, as seen in the concept of liminality (Bettis, 1996) there is mediation in the goings-on of the world with the daily life of the student creating interplay between the macro and the micro worlds. Such is what the participants seem to be undergoing in that voluntarily or otherwise they perceive that their surroundings are changing and that these changes are in turn causing them to change their character in line with what is required in the macro world. The “getting away” from a closely knit environment at the heart of their secondary education in one way enables them but also requires them to become agents of their own planning and organisation. This shift from a tight environment with different socialisation opportunities might create opportunities for change. In the next section, these individual changes and how these were brought about are analysed.

The theme entitled “Individual Changes” emerges as a self-reflection throughout the transition. Changes were experienced in the different ways and to different extents arising out of the various experiences that the participants encountered. The first

subtheme focuses on the issues about having male as well as new female class mates and how this has brought about different changes in the personalities of the participants. In another subtheme we see that one of the participants developed a “fear of the unknown” and she now reacts to such a situation by doing her own thinking twice. A third subtheme emerges in that participants also talked about how they learnt to prioritise either by recognising the need for a different kind of friendship, or through the realisation that school needed to be given more importance. For Melissa a new opportunity for success was created as she stated that she performed better owing to the different assessment strategy adopted by MCAST. On the other hand for Daniela, changing from full-time student to full-time worker brought about a change in her way of life. Her new responsibilities make her happier and the type of change experienced between her own life at school and her life in full-time employment consequently this is the subject of the fourth subtheme. For Daniela the responsibility in taking care of a business serves as a boost to her identity which was deemed to be negative when associated to the idea of being a student. Doanna’s discourse gives rise to the development of the fifth and sixth subthemes. For Doanna change is brought about by her conscious effort to move away from her family both physically and also psychologically. Within this theme we see that the ways in which participants talk about their work experiences and how they changed owing to this, gave rise to the final subtheme describing individual changes for the participants. Work placements influenced preconceived ideas and challenged client stereotypes for the participants whilst also helped participants to overcome shyness and helped them to develop work skills. In its entirety, this theme shows that there is evidence of individualisation (Beck, 1992) for the participants of this study and in both within as well as without the vigilance of their family; participants slowly became agents of their livelihood. This livelihood is mediated by the market as well and their own biographical planning and organisation. We also find evidence of liminality (Bettis, 1996)

as the participants created an interplay between the macro world and their own micro worlds.

5.1.1.1 Moving into Co-educational Settings

Ariana is able to note a change in character which to her is positive and which came about in order for her to adapt to the introduction of males in class. She claims that her character has changed. Fournier (1996) explains that according to Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955), the world does not reveal itself to us, rather, we construe it. PCP posits that the individual is fully in control and wholly agentic. People develop their own set of constructs to help them make sense of the world and themselves. Thus two persons are likely to develop different constructions of the same event. Just as Ariana is now more outgoing, PCP posits that another person might have a different reaction to the introduction of the opposite sex in the classroom. Moreover, since change takes place from within the existing construction system, it is likely to follow different directions for different individuals. Although Kelly (1955) suggests that we engage in a continual process of constructive revision, he also accounts for our failure to change. Doanna in fact changed course rather than herself when confronted with a similar situation.

Your character changes because at school we were just girls and now we are mixed with males. It's much better like this....much better because you are able to make different friends. Even when we go out....we all go out together during break and we go to the park all together. The majority of the time we were eighteen in class but then some of us left and we ended up fifteen. I am not as quiet as I used to be at school and I am more of an extrovert now.

(Ariana, second interview)

I have now chosen the City and Guilds Diploma in Hairdressing as a Course at MCAST. At ICT I found it really difficult to make friends so I was getting really bored. We were only three females in class!

(Doanna, second interview)

Although Kelly (1955) suggests that we engage in a continual process of constructive revision, he also accounts for our failure to change. There are two factors which are said to limit change namely the tightness of an individual's construction system and threat. People experience threat when they feel that their core values and identity are challenged which is when they feel they are expected or required to become somebody they do not want to become. The lack of females in class as well as not finding the course as interesting as she expected it to did not effect Doanna's micro world and she adapted by changing her macro world.

5.1.1.2 Learning to Think

Christine is more aware of the fact that she does not really know her class mates, so she is more careful in the way she speaks. Liminality as described by Bettis (1996) mediates the goings-on of the world with the daily life of the student creating interplay between the macro and the micro worlds. Christine's micro world is affected by the macro world of the unknown. She chooses not to comment in the way that she used to at secondary school for fear of hurting her colleagues whom she does not know as well as the friends she previously had. Later on she also claims that she has become more sensitive and that experience is what makes individuals change. Her experience in this relationship has made her more sensitive and more attuned to what her friends and others in general might need from her.

Christine has matured a lot because before I used to say whatever comes to mind. However, now we are more students in class and you must be careful not to hurt anyone because you would not know what they are experiencing in life. So I think twice. I think I matured in class because now I pay more attention. But I don't know.

(Christine, second interview)

When I was dating that guy he always used to tell me that I was going to fail. He left me exactly after my exams and then I received my results and

said: "At least – Phew!" I have no idea why he used to tell me that I was going to fail but he really used to put me down all the time. He used to tell me that I was fat and that he did not like my clothes. There were moments when I said: "What was I doing with this guy?" But then it's difficult when you love someone it's difficult to accept that you will not be able to stay with him any longer. But today I say: "Thank God it happened!" So today I feel that I have changed a lot but when you would not have experienced certain issues, you cannot talk about them in the sense that if my friend came to tell me that her boyfriend left her I would have been sympathetic towards her but I would not have really understood the issues. But today I must say that I have a lot to say about this! I would really know what advice to give and I would be really different in that!

(Christine, third interview)

Here Christine talks about a sense of growth that she has witnessed in herself as a result of this relationship. She is also almost reiterating what adults around her have told her in that it is experience which is what really teaches about life.

Maria however states that she has changed considerably and perceives this in herself because it is not her friends who impose this on her but because she is now thinking twice before she speaks and because she is careful about not making any rash decisions.

I am different because I now manage to think twice before speaking. I am learning how to keep back before ending up in awkward situations. I think things through before actually taking rash decisions – not always but at least I try to.

(Maria, third interview)

Although both Maria and Christine claim that they have changed, the latter states that she is ready to share her experience with others whilst the former reserves the experience that she has gained to her own self.

5.1.1.3 Learning to Prioritise

Kirsty states that she has changed because she consciously changed the group of friends that she stays with. Previously her friends did not allow her to pay attention but now she is able to. Similarly Maria states that she has changed because her friends actually take her along with them to the lessons. Therefore this change does not seem deeply ingrained for Maria but it is rather what she defines as a positive form of peer pressure.

I changed because I changed my friends. Before I never paid any attention but now I am very different.

(Kirsty, second interview)

I have turned over a new leaf...however my friends take me with them to lessons. Last year I used to be always in the Director's office because I skipped lessons. This year is OK though.

(Maria, second interview)

Rather than disengagement reinforced by peer pressure, Maria has experienced engagement. Although her learning identity seems somewhat damaged, her peers have not further estranged her from the learning community. This is unlike what happens in Debra's case. (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000) Sources of positive learner identity were perhaps unavailable in the secondary school but at MCAST, Maria seems to have been able to change things round. On the other hand, *"Debra was doubly stigmatized and othered both socially and academically."* (Ball et al, 2000: 45)

Melissa speaks about change on two aspects. The MCAST system seems to appeal to her a great deal and she is paying more attention to lessons. However, she also claims that the change from secondary school to MCAST in her eyes was a big one particularly in the type of assessment strategies adopted.

"During secondary, I did not use to pay attention to lessons. This year it's much more different because we have assignments and with tests I was

not interested at all. The change from secondary to MCAST is a big one but you must not give up and you must keep on working hard.”
(Melissa, second interview)

Melissa also attributes her change in motivation to study as the result of a change in assessment strategy which is motivating her to work consistently harder throughout the year. It seems that tests did not give her a chance to succeed whereas the new system at MCAST has been working very well for her. This finds relevance to the discussion in section 5.1.2.3 for Ariana. Both participants are endowed with a sense of personal efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The situation at MCAST is well-managed by both and this in turn motivates them to work harder.

Christine has learnt how to prioritise and she now thinks that attending lectures at MCAST is by now far more important than actually going off to Junior College to meet up with her friends. However this has taken some time to sink in and she suffered the consequences during her first year at the course because she had some examination re-sits to take.

At school there was a very big change for me. In the first year I was like a kid and we used to go off to Junior college to meet up with friends. But then you start maturing and you realize that without proper schooling you won't get very far and that you have to put effort so that you won't waste three years or how many they are! So there was a big change in me there yes! From the first year to the second year there was a big change in the marks that I used to achieve. In the first year I had re-sits but in the second year I got everything in the first sit. I felt really good about it.
(Christine, second interview)

Consequences to actions or behaviour at college are very similar to what goes on in an organisation. Values for Christine have changed in that she now realises that investing in her studies will result in her earning better grades. This is a value which she

acquires throughout her socialisation at MCAST and which has caused her to undergo adjustment (Ashforth, 2001)

On the other hand, Maria also refers to an incident where she went to the bank for a loan to purchase a car. Here the structure inherent in society such as that imposed by one of the most traditional organisations namely a banking institution has curtailed Maria's agentic behaviour.

A few weeks ago I was going to make a terrible mistake because I was going to buy a car. So I was going to take a loan to buy a car. What stopped me was the fact that I do not afford it. I went to the bank and he told me that he could not issue a loan for me! The message was "You stay as you are, work and save up. Then come again!"

(Maria, third interview)

"Bounded Agency" (Evans, 2007) is demonstrated here in that Maria still intends to buy a car (agency) but she cannot do so until she has a stable job and is able to provide the bank with a guarantee for a loan (structure). Hence as Evans purports we see that Maria's agency is socially situated agency as she has herself decided that she needs a car to travel but it is influenced and not determined by the bank as she will still intends to eventually purchase one.

5.1.1.4 Taking On Other Responsibilities

Daniela speaks about the different kind of pressure she has at work which makes her happier. In her eyes she can handle pressure which arises on a daily basis but she found school work to be very tough and stressful. At first she finds it difficult to assess herself and in fact Viney (1992) points out that adults find it difficult to assert how and to what extent they have changed. It is almost as though Daniela disowns the capacity or willingness to assess the extent to which she has changed. Through her words it is as

though she asserts that the extent to which an individual changes cannot be ascertained by her own self. Nevertheless on giving it some thought she came up with the distinction in the pressure experienced between life at school and life at work. In fact, Martini and Dion (2001) state that the participants in their research see their own personal characteristics as evolving across time.

About the way I changed....well I think you should ask my mum or my friends because I really find it difficult to assess. I changed because I really feel happy because when I used to go to school I used to look at my diary and say 'I really have too much to do'. When I went to sleep I used to say 'Tomorrow I will yet again have more work to do'. I think I used to be shattered. You would say 'Oh no...what would she have done if she studied at University for seven years?' But today I don't have any problems of this sort maybe a few at work...and at least my mind is at rest on this thing. If my work day is over at work so are my problems. What I mean is that at work I am always with my notebook because I really have a lot to do and I am always phoning suppliers and clients with a lot of responsibility on mobile phone guarantees. It seems that the responsibility has increased when compared to school but I can handle it because I am more relaxed.

(Daniela, second interview)

Daniela might be reflecting on the fact that she has changed in different aspects of her character and she could not fathom this as being a single change. Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955) postulates that individuals may develop a series of subsystems inherently incompatible to one other. Therefore Daniela could have at that point in time found it difficult to iterate what was going on in that she might have been through a process of seeing herself changing and in developing contradictory ways of seeing the world in different contexts. One might point out that her parents were not really happy that she did not further her studies but on the other hand she feels happy working because this has lessened the amount of stress that she had at school. To summarise, Ball et al. (2000) state that students know that the chances for a good job without an education decrease but a damaged learner identity makes education seem like an impossible or “unpalatable option.”

Later on Daniela moves on to work in the family business and she runs one of the clothes retail outlets in Valletta. She thinks that she has changed by means of the responsibility that her parents have entrusted her with as they do no longer need to check on her with regard to her work. She has also changed because she is no longer thinking that much about hairdressing, about her experience at the mobile shop and about modelling. She states that she now needs to focus on this retail outlet in Valletta and considers the fact that something might happen to her parents so she needs to learn how to run the business on her own.

I feel that I have grown up a lot because it's not the first time that we had employees working with us and I am the boss so I have to tell them what to do. My parents do not even come to check on me over here at the shop and it's all in my hands. My parents trust me a lot in the shop. I would now like to concentrate on this shop. I sometimes go to help in the hairdressing shop I used to work in if they are stuck but I would like to focus on this shop just in case something happens to my parents. I need to be able to handle this business and I always wanted my own shop.
(Daniela, third interview)

The gradual increase in responsibility that Daniela has undertaken through work might have curtailed her capacity in witnessing any significant changes within herself. However, on the other hand, she realises that she has responsibilities with regard to the family business. The family is for her the basic structure and focal point in her life. She is aware that she liked the job she had at the mobile store but chooses the family business with a sense of responsibility. Furthermore, Daniela reaches a compromise: She does not further her studies as her parents wish but she then gives them a helping hand. I find this relevant to Bourdieu's (in Grenfell and James, 1998) application of the habitus. Daniela's parents are educated to tertiary level and have done their utmost for their daughter to further her studies. However, this wish was not reinforced by the school environment as Daniela was always in the lower streams and was heavily influenced by

her peers. Consequently, Daniela chooses work over school but moves closer to the habitus she acquired from her family and which is that of running a successful family business. In Daniela's transition we witness continuous restructuring with a habitus which adapts according to her experiences.

5.1.1.5 Changing by Moving Away From the Family

Doanna compares the way she felt at the Institute of Communication Technology and the way she feels at the Institute of Community Services in the Hairdressing Course. She found it very hard to make friends and to open up during her first year at MCAST and in fact she quit. She realized that she could open up with a few friends about the situation at home and she seems to find solace in this. She seems to have adapted at home by avoiding arguments and not opening up. Rose (1992) in Ball et al. (2000: 4) maintains that young people do talk about choices and hard work. What Doanna seems to be experiencing is a "calculating self" defined as being "a self that calculates about itself in order to better itself." In this sense she feels that she chooses to cope by opening up to her friends whilst choosing to keep away from her family in order to avoid any uneasiness.

I feel that my character has changed. I have new friends now in hairdressing. At home they did not like the fact that I left ICT but then they got used to it slowly.

(Doanna, second interview)

I have changed because now I am able to tell others about the situation at home. I never did so before. At home I do not tell anyone anything about myself because we'll end up arguing so I am more likely to tell my friends.

(Doanna, second interview)

As described in the previous chapter, Doanna's parents live on the dole and an easy way out for Doanna would be to follow their example. However, for Doanna, schooling is a means of escape. MCAST offers her the possibility of socializing more

and in finding others like herself who are able to understand her. The applicability of Bourdieu's habitus (In James and Grenfell, 1998) here is different to the way in which it was applied for Daniela's case. It seems that college and friends have given Doanna the impetus to move away from her family.

5.1.1.6: Creating a New Personal Image

Doanna is undergoing "individualisation" (Beck 1992). She carefully points out that the way she looks is the development of her own style and that her tattoos and earrings enable her to externalise the way she feels and thinks. Individualisation is about how individuals inside and outside the family become the agents of their livelihood which is mediated by the market as well as their biographical planning and organisation. Doanna adapted styles that she got to know about through her exposure to the media and friends to her own liking. These styles are also continuously changing and developing because of the fashion requirements. Hence Doanna is expressing what she feels in the way she looks by using fashion opportunities in doing so. This process of change can be said to be constant and it works through a discovery of the self and its expression through body art in the form of tattoos and piercing. They are a symbol which acts as a reminder in rough times which seem to be also instances when other forms of expression such as talking and arguing particularly with her family are not permissible to Doanna. Withstanding the painful experience of having a tattoo made, and also any form of piercing, remind Doanna that she is courageous and that she is able to take on pain. This behaviour has developed throughout the three interviews that I held with her.

Tattoos and piercing have helped me to develop my own style which is a little bit Goth and a little bit Punk. I am neither one nor the other. I have taken a little bit of both and developed my own style which is a little softer than what is usually attributed to these styles. I want to express myself in this way with tattoos and earrings and my hair. The tattooed stars are

cool because I got them done when I was sixteen. I really like them because they are small but at the same time beautiful.

(Doanna, second interview)

It's not that I want to stand out but because each earring and tattoo creates its own experience. It's about me being able to do it and to withstand that experience as well. It shows my courage which at times I am not able to show at home or elsewhere. Tattoos and earrings remind me that I have courage and they give me courage. I like to express my feelings in this way.

(Doanna, third interview)

In my opinion it seems important to note that tattoos and piercing are just the façade of individualisation which permeates itself and which is radical to what Doanna experiences at her family of origin. As Beck (1992) postulates, Doanna's choice to do hairdressing has been a process of liberation from her family. This brought about a loss of stability in that she went against her parents' wishes and once again reintegrated herself through her self-expression in the form of tattoos and piercing.

5.1.1.7 Taking on New Roles

In Doanna's scenario, we can also apply the distinction between "personal change" and "role innovation". The Institute of Community Services does not allow students to wear earrings at school and on work placement. However, Doanna went on with piercing in that she intends to renew the conventional image of a hairdresser eventually. Therefore although she has learnt the ropes of becoming a qualified hairdresser, which might be considered some "personal change", she has also taken this one step further and integrated her personal likes and style to the role (Role Innovation) (Ashforth, 2001).

In her final interview, Doanna seems to move one step further in this direction. She states that she is no longer afraid of talking about the way she feels or about what

she is thinking. She claims that the change in her workplace for placement in the salon has brought about this change.

I changed because I am no longer very shy. I am also no longer afraid of talking about the way I feel or about what I am thinking? The change in salon has brought about this change. Because even the clients speak to me and I could build a certain amount of confidence with them.

(Doanna, third interview)

Phoebe speaks about the way she changed in dealing with people which came about through her experience in sales in the shop. This is similar to Melissa and what she had to say about her learning on placement as part of her MCAST course in care.

Even with people I have changed. In the beginning I used to ask them a lot of questions at one go. Now I am calmer and I have changed.

(Phoebe, second interview)

Melissa speaks positively about the type of skills that she learns during her course in care in that she learnt how to deal with different populations and that she has grown to be more patient than she used to.

I changed because I am more aware of what there is in life and I know how to interact with people and to be more patient with children and old people. I am now more aware on how to deal with these people.

(Melissa, second interview)

On speaking about her experiences on work placement during the final interview, Melissa points to a further change. She refers to the way in which she had preconceived ideas about some client populations which were challenged during her work placement. She exemplifies this as follows:

These (homeless) people whom I thought would be tough and aggressive turned out to be really nice. So this experience really changed my mind about these people and I feel that I did well in this placement. I learnt a lot even about my own strengths and weaknesses. Even being OK with them helps them. They had all kinds of problems and I would have thought that I was unable to do anything for them if they had been through such a lot in life! Being there and listening is already a positive thing for these people.

(Melissa, third interview)

The problems that I saw in this work placement were bigger than those we dealt with during our First Diploma. During the First Diploma we were placed with old people and people with a disability whereas now we are dealing with bigger problems and they are more challenging. It is more challenging because each and every one of us will be an old person eventually and this is a natural part of life. However, in this placement, and in life not everyone will go through the kinds of problems that I saw. And some circumstances in life put people in peculiar situations.

(Melissa, third interview)

Nicholson and West (1988: 105) state that personal change involves reactive change in the individual and this may range from minor alterations in daily routines and habits to major developments in relationships and self-image. The way Melissa speaks about the skills learnt during the time she was at foundation and first diploma level courses in care indicates that there was change in the way she dealt with people and in the way she approaches her work. This change further develops in what she experiences during her work placement at national diploma level where she now deals with social care rather than health care. She learns that some people undergo experiences that she and her family had never experienced and that her initial helplessness during the placement was replaced by a sense of achievement and maturity.

5.1.1.8 The Nature of Individual Changes

The changes described by the participants were various, occurred in different instances and also arose out of a number of opportunities that presented themselves

throughout the participants' lives. Moreover, most of the time, these females were aware that they were undergoing change, and they are also aware of what brought about these changes. These excerpts show us evidence of individualisation (Beck, 1992) as both inside and outside their family they are slowly becoming the agents of their livelihood, which is mediated by the market as well as their biographical planning and organisation. Similarly liminality (Bettis, 1996) can also be applied as these individuals create interplay between the macro world and their own micro worlds. This is seen as early as their first exposure to work environments, where participants also struggled between personal change and role innovation (Ashforth, 2001).

The self is a "calculating self" (Rose, 1992) which calculates possibilities, and takes action to better itself. The agency undertaken by the self is bound by rules and structures, and learns by developing personal constructs, which might be also incompatible. The participants' habitus is thus not pervasive, but it is capable of changing and of finding compromise between different constructs.

5.1.2 Finding a Learning Status

In this study, assessment seems to have an effect on the learning identity(ies) of the participants. In educational environments, where streaming is practiced, research by Chetcuti (2001), indicates that assessment outcomes directly impinge not only on the identities of the students as learners but also on their self-esteem in general. The evidence given by most of the participants of this study during their first interview which was held two months prior the commencement of ordinary level examinations seems to indicate that their life will be wholly dependant on the way they will perform in these examinations.

The data, from which this theme was elicited, leads to the further development of three subthemes. Participants spoke about ways in which their secondary school gave messages about their status as learners and about the emphasis that is given to ordinary level examinations as being the most important benchmark in this respect. Participants point out that it is futile thinking about what course to take because available choices would then depend on the final examination results. Furthermore, participants are aware of the importance of the exams and do not feel adequately prepared for them or perhaps worse so, unable to react. Moreover, experiences following the issue of examination results gave rise to a separate subtheme in that participants were coming to terms with the outcome of their examination results and also preparing themselves for a new school and/or work opportunities. The interviewees state that they know they are not amongst the best of students and that they have damaged learner identities. However, Christine talks about her success as the examination results have further reinforced her status as a successful learner. For Doanna however, the outcomes of the ordinary level examination results do not really have an impact, as the family situation absorbs most of the attention of all her family members including her own. Later on, once the participants started attending MCAST, changes in perceptions of learning status or otherwise were further developed through a comparison of the examination system at the secondary school and assessment through the assignment-based system at the college.

5.1.2.1 Ordinary-Level Examinations: Barriers or Opportunities?

In her initial interview Christine tries to envisage herself in a job in the future, but says that this is futile because it all depends on the outcome of her exams. When replying she interrupts herself, as though she is telling herself to quit dreaming about what might be possible to take up for her studies in order to face reality. During the

interview, Christine seems to experience a barrier or an impasse in her thoughts. She almost thinks that if she does not make it this time then it seems that she will not be awarded any other chances.

I did try to find a little bit about different jobs...I would like to work as a secretary but you have to pass your O levels. I am really looking at what I can do once I finish but it might be all useless because first I must pass my exams.

(Christine, first interview)

These exams seem to create a significant source of pressure for the participants in my study. Throughout the following subthemes, we find the influence of a structure, which has been inherent in the past prior to the setting up of MCAST, where without ordinary level passes, one could not further his/her studies at tertiary level. The modus operandi and fear created by this structure has not changed, even though the opportunities and second-chance pathways have been created and have increased. There seems to be an inevitable and obvious fear of examinations, as the result attained will ultimately place the participants in either of two categories, namely the “bright” and the “weak”.

5.1.2.1.1 Examinations as sources of pressure

Christine points out that the ordinary level exams are worrying her, although she has never worried about anything else in her life and that other experiences that she had to face were not comparable to the difficulties that these examinations are posing on her.

The “O” level exams are really worrying me.

(Christine, first interview)

Maria seems to be more scared for some of the subjects than for others, but seems to be unable to focus on her studies in general. She seems to lack training in how to approach exams, and from her comment it seems that she has not even practiced enough by working through past papers. Her comment seems to indicate that she is in reality scared about the structure of the examination rather than the actual content required from the questions. This might mean that it's useless thinking about how difficult they are because that is taken for granted and she was always "below average" as a student. It seems as though she is not even worried that her performance will be lower than what her friends will attain as that is taken for granted. Her main concern is that of being able to control her panic and not being at a loss about what the actual exam paper would look like.

I will sit for 9 'O' levels. I am scared about how the exam will be set up and not about how difficult they will be. For Biology and Italian I am really scared.

(Maria, first interview)

Right now my marks are going down by the minute. I really don't know why. No matter how much I study it's always useless....when I don't study I fail. If I really study hard, I end up forgetting everything.....I really don't know it's like I'm panicking. I am not afraid of doing a worse job than my friends because I was always below average. From Form 3 upwards I was always below average.

(Maria, first interview)

For Daniela, examinations not only create pressure which for others may have been transformed into proactivity but helplessness.

I am going to sit for 11 MATSEC O level exams. I don't feel that well right now because I think that I am going to do very badly. We really have a lot to do. I don't know but I feel that this year everything came together and too suddenly. Even at school a lot was happening. I am not feeling prepared at all and with regard to studying I don't feel that I am ready. My options are Business Studies and Computer but I think that I am giving up on Maths and Physics and everyone does so. I always passed my options but this year I did badly and I failed.

(Daniela, first interview)

For Daniela, the pressure is so great that she is almost unable to react. Preparation for eleven ordinary level examinations at this point seems to be a great ordeal and she never refers to any concrete plans albeit giving up on mathematics and physics as everyone seems to do so. Although also scared, Melissa copes by stating that she will feel uneasy only until she starts her exam. She comments that for even the physical education practical examination she was scared when for students this is usually considered to be an enjoyable and easy task.

I will sit for nine MATSEC Exams. I am scared because even when I went to do the PE practical I was scared. Even for the practical I was scared! But then once you start, you settle down and you start feeling better.
(Melissa, first interview)

On the other hand, Phoebe is worried that school activities are getting in the way so that she would like to carry on with her studies. She points out that she is scared in particular subjects more than she would be in others because of her particular strengths and weaknesses.

I am really scared because I am not studying mostly because of the activity that we are holding on the 3rd of April. We are trying to manage everything ourselves. But I will continue to study harder and we'll see...what I am really scared of is that I do not manage to pass. I am scared of Maths because I was always weak in it. Physics also scares me but lately I am doing better because in form 3 I could not get the hang of it and I started going to private lessons straightaway so it was better.
(Phoebe, first interview)

The episode of examinations towards the end of the fifth form puts everything in the life of the participants to a halt. All other facts in life seem to be on hold not only because they need to and want to focus their energy in preparation for these examinations, but also because they are unable to plan ahead since everything seems to revolve around the results which they will attain. Contrary to what is portrayed in the scenario for Rachel in Ball et al. (2000) gap years do not seem to be a possibility as

transitions in the way understood by the participants at this point are entirely “linear” (Evans and Furlong, 1997), and must progress as dictated by the system.

5.1.2.2 Establishing a Learning Identity

Following the issue of examination results, participants described themselves as belonging to one of three different patterns. Some participants live with a damaged learning identity which had already been evolving during their secondary education but which was endorsed from the results attained in the ordinary level exams. For others, results gave them a boost to further their studies. For one of the participants, experiencing examinations was not deemed to be an experience which indicates pressure and the results made no impact on her life.

5.1.2.2.1 Damaged Learning Identities: Minimising Risk as a Strategy for Self-Preservation

Maria does not speak about her examinations as being negative or positive once the results are out. Maria did not intend to re-sit her exams but just passively accepts the result. She does not link her results to a comparison to the school assessment system as is portrayed by Melissa in Section 5.1.2.2.2.

I got 2 “O” levels. Two others I got a six and the remaining ones I got a “U”.

(Maria, second interview)

In her final interview, Maria however talks about not being the best student. This seems to be an identity that she is still carrying around with her even though at MCAST she has successfully attained her Foundation and First Diploma Certificates. The learning identity that developed throughout her life seems to be pervasive and unlikely to change because she seems to compare the learning situation in the classroom to what

happened throughout her years at the secondary school. Here we find that Maria has a very low perceived learner status. The habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) ensures the active presence of past experiences which in her take the form of schemes of perception, thoughts and action. Maria thus feels that she belongs in the category of the weaker students and this sense of belonging is carried with her and remains throughout her life as a student at MCAST.

I tend to get disheartened a lot. The best thing is that I manage to pass. At the secondary school, teachers did not expect so much from me. Over here they expect too much though! I am doing so and so in my school work. I manage to pass but not with flying colours. I find Mr. B's most difficult because the subject is difficult! The lectures are like a madhouse and there is a lot of noise. We are the naughtiest at MCAST! Mr. B. ends up shouting his head off most of the time but he still manages to cover a lot of work. In fact he is the one who managed to do most work with us!
(Maria, third interview)

Daniela, however, seems to be totally disengaged from the learning community. As stated in the example of Debra (Ball et al., 2000) she withdraws to repair her identity and self-esteem which have been damaged by her experiences at school with its examples of student inferiority. She seems ambivalent about how her results were and she seems to be happy with her achievement and almost indirectly states that she is working and what she has is good enough for her to work. Reay (2001: 334) points out that education for the working classes has delved upon failure and about a sense of being found out in a place where one does not really belong. Reay (2001) also points out that this phenomenon is not particular to the English context. However, it seems that for Daniela this result will presently not affect her current state of affairs and her positive identity as a worker. For Daniela, a negative learning identity has pushed her away from a formal learning environment which in this case would have been MCAST and has oriented her in the direction of fostering a positive worker identity by focusing her energy

on her full-time and part-time work. It has also seemed to reinforce what Reay (2001) states in that further education is not where Daniela belongs as she has been “found out” but it is the work environment where she feels satisfied and accomplished. This does not necessarily mean that a negative learning identity would inevitably result in a positive working identity. In Daniela’s career trajectory the development seems to have been pushed this way also because of her family’s background in the retail business. Holding a job with some success in sales seems to be a worthwhile experience for her.

Daniela seems to have been greatly influenced by her peers in her choices. In her first interview she states that they are only five in class because the rest have all found employment even before finishing their fifth form. In her second interview she states that the fact that her friends did not pursue their studies influenced her a lot and her parents are unhappy with the choices that she made.

All my friends in my class quit and started to work. And now we’re about five in class.

(Daniela, first interview)

The fact that my friends did not take up studying influenced me a lot. My parents are not happy with the choice I made and they were really angry with me when I paid for the evening classes and everything and just quit. At one point I was really studying and doing well and I was doing a real lot of essays and at another I was getting bored. When we were at school we were all set in our targets as we all wanted to go to Junior College, university and MCAST but then they all came back saying that they stopped and that they got bored studying. Last Sunday at the village feast, all those who went to Junior College said that they are bored and that they have too much to do.

(Daniela, second interview)

Daniela seems to portray what Kelly (2009) defines as student disengagement which is greatly exacerbated when pro-school behaviour is sanctioned among peers. An anti-school value system is supported when students need to cope with low academic status. This disengagement comes about when the student is given messages that she

does not belong to the school environment and that anything that she does at school will not be fruitful. Students then feel that they do not belong and collectively “decide” to give up on their studies in order to work. In Daniela’s case it seems that her peers were more influential than her parents.

Daniela is the youngster living in the “risk society” (Beck, 1992). As a person she has learnt to conceive of herself as the centre of action trying to minimize risk and to maximize personal opportunities. For her, studying has become a risk and work has become a personal opportunity which she should not miss. In relation to her ideas about school Bandura (1997) states that beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the key factor of human agency and in this case, Daniela believes that she has no power to produce valid results in her exams so she will not attempt them.

On the other hand Daniela states that she had a very negative experience at MCAST and claims that she has literally pushed away the possibility of attending a course there due to the way she was treated.

I remember I had phoned (MCAST) I don't know how many times and they don't even give you the benefit of the doubt. And then I gave up! Everyone was telling me to try again the following year but the fact that I was not going to be with my friends really put me off. I was not going to be a junior student when my friends would be the senior ones. This affected me a lot so I said that it would be better if I gave it up!
(Daniela, second interview)

Daniela comments about the structure of the institution in that they would not even let her explain herself about what happened whilst not permitting her a second chance to sit for her entrance exam. Evans and Rudd (1998) state that life experience for young people is complicated by the fact that they can react and respond to structural

influences, that they can make their own decisions with respect to a number of major or minor life experiences and they can actively shape some important dimensions of their life experiences. This is what Daniela seems to have done out of her experience with MCAST. Her damaged learner identity acquired from school which was then further affirmed by her performance in the ordinary level examinations coupled to the rejection from MCAST has spurred her to find and keep a job. Although she tentatively tried, through evening classes to get back on track, she found it hard as she was cut off from her social network. Her social network, her friends, seem very important to her as reapplying at MCAST for her the subsequent year was out of the question as she would not be with her friends. Daniela's failure seems to be attributed to her own self thus closely resembling what Evans (2007) established for the English educational culture where opportunities are available to all. However, this analysis does not really establish whether educational opportunities in Malta are available to all those who desire to further their studies. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Maltese culture seems to celebrate success as being personal whilst attributing failure to structure. In this case, Daniela's lack of enthusiasm to pursue her studies seems to be attributed at least in part to MCAST over the incidence of her entrance test which is described by her as follows:

I had applied to get into MCAST. I applied for a hairdressing course...I had been there and I was really angry so I did not want to do anything at MCAST. I don't remember exactly what happened. I had applied and I had given them all my papers. I applied with all my friends and somehow I did not realize that I had to sit for an entrance examination before admission. I had no idea that I had to do this test. They told me that they had informed me but they didn't and I did not do it because no-one told me about it. And all my friends were asking me why I did not turn up for the test. I told them 'But why didn't you tell me before?' Then I phoned MCAST to tell them that I needed to do it on another day but they told me that it could not be done. I told them that no-one had informed me and they told me that it was not true because they sent letters and they phoned each and every candidate. Had I known about it I would have gone for sure. I remember that I had cried my heart out knowing that my friends had made it and I was left out. I really wanted to go to MCAST and

then I gave up and I pushed it aside. Then I applied to go evening classes but eventually I gave those up as well!

(Daniela, second interview)

To be honest I was having a look at the evening courses and I had started attending. I applied for the 'O' level course, I paid them and then I quit. I had started working as a hairdresser and I was quite happy. Then I started hearing about friends of mine who were really bright at school who were giving up their studies and I said that if they gave up then so should I. Then I started working in the mobile shop and I am doing well.

(Daniela, second interview)

Sometimes I say that it's a blessing that I did not continue my studies because I would have stopped. I think it would have been a waste of time and I am really sorry that I wasted my parents' money for the evening courses. I also feel sorry that I did not keep up my studies because it's nice to have certificates. For me it's enough not to give it all up and not to be a complete idiot. For example I can hold a good conversation in English.....that is my problem. In Religion for instance I used to do really well and I used to come first in class and then I really did badly in my 'O' level. For me to forget everything is easy! And I said that it really was not worth the amount of effort that I did. The same for English because I really did well at school and I did not get a pass mark. So it's a blessing that I stopped! So maybe I don't know but perhaps in the future I can take another course!

(Daniela, second interview)

Daniela still keeps her options open in her final interview. She foresees the necessity of taking courses in languages owing to the number of foreigners she has to deal with as clients in her shop. However, Daniela does not like long term commitments and these seem to scare her. Further education here takes another form. It is not only about formal certification but also about the kind of non-formal learning which goes on at work. For Daniela and her parents dealing in stock is a learning opportunity which might be just as valid and important for this work as formally learning a language.

I would like to do a part-time course. I would not like long-term commitments because they worry me. My mother wants me to take private lessons and to learn some languages because we get quite a lot of foreigners here. My parents would like me to study but when they see that I am so interested they encourage me to go and to deal for stock.

Right now, the salesgirl we had just left so I cannot go abroad and leave the shop but I think that I will go very soon!

(Daniela, third interview)

5.1.2.2.2 Being Successful

We find a complete change in Christine who has boosted her identity as a learner. She finds that her success with achieving good marks in her exams has spurred her to look forward and to further her studies in the area of business.

Ordinary levels do not worry me any more. I would like to sit for my 'A' level in Accounts. To be honest I had already started attending private lessons but the one who was coming with me already had an 'A' level and I didn't really understand anything so I stopped. Now I will start again after this year because at MCAST we would have covered what is equivalent to an 'A' level.

(Christine, second interview)

Melissa who, like Daniela, also seems to have had a negative learning identity at school, points out that what she did at school was irrelevant to her, and so she was not bothered to study. However, at MCAST she started taking an interest and she did very well. The fact that what she was studying at MCAST was more relevant to her seems to have engaged her interest in learning resulting in more effort on her part. Her success in the foundation year resulted in further success in her results for the First Diploma in Health and Social Care and she was one of the very few who managed to attain a Distinction in all the six units. Aptitude, relevance and the attainment of a positive learner identity seem to have enabled a successful transition for Melissa.

I had done about 9 or 10 'O' levels and I did really well only in English. At MCAST I paid more attention and although Foundation Year was still based on exams, I did well and I was astonished because at school I never got such high marks. I chose to study care and it was what I wanted so I paid more attention. In secondary you study for 'O' levels and I never paid attention to them.

(Melissa, second interview)

Hallam (2010) states that motivation is crucial in the development of expertise. Melissa's interest seems to have been internalised and integrated over the long term because her success at MCAST has spanned over four years as opposed to the lack of success that she experienced at her secondary school.

Phoebe seems to be satisfied with the results she got and still thinks that they were worth the effort even though she works as a shop assistant. She has found the knowledge she gained from her maths, computer and languages ordinary levels to be extremely useful to her at work. She would like to focus her studies on what is necessary at work so she intends to re-sit her Italian because of the type of foreign clients that tend to shop in the outlet she works in.

I did well in my 'O' levels and I got 9 of them. In fact I will now continue my studies on interior design. I will do this in Winter. I do not regret having studied for my exams because I would not be here. I work here because I have 'O' levels. I think I got a "2" in Maltese, a "4" in geography, religion and English, a "5" in maths and environmental studies. What I did not get was social studies but I forgot but on my mobile phone I still have my result because I saved it. I admit that I was not the studious type so if I had not studied and gone to private lessons..... And here we work with an 'O' level standard and they still ask us for these certificates even though we work in a shop. Art and computer have helped me here and so have maths and the languages. Now I must take a course in Italian because I sat for my Italian and did not pass since I am not so good in it. Here, at St.Julian's I get a lot of Italians as clients and I find it difficult to understand them and to deal with them.

(Phoebe, second interview)

Phoebe's interest in furthering studies is fuelled by her job which is currently her main motivator. Her learning identity is one which permits growth as long as she is interested in what she is learning and this learning has significance and is worthwhile to her life. For Phoebe, transition between school and work has given her the grounds for pursuing areas of expertise to develop (Hallam, 2010). Although she has boosted her

learning identity via good grades in her MATSEC Ordinary level exams, exposure to work, namely her experience in transition has fuelled in her a desire to learn within the remit of merchandising which is what her work is about.

Motivation is thus vital to learning (Hallam, 2010) because of the considerable investment of time and effort that is required. It seems that during secondary school students are told that getting a six or a seven as a result (one being the highest grade and 5 being the lowest pass mark for academic entry) in MATSEC Ordinary levels would be valid as a working certificate. To my knowledge as a practitioner in the field, this is far from being true. However, the implicit message given to Daniela here is that she should quit her studies and go to work because the majority of her results seemed to have been a six. Here we see that there are several motivators at play. For Daniela, her lack of interest, support as well as final results all seemed to point her in the direction of seeking a job. In the case of Melissa who did not mention that sixes and sevens were useful to attain employment, her attainment of the Foundation Certificate in Care, with flying colours, seemed to have been the main motivator coupled with the interest she took in the subject that she was studying. For Phoebe, relevance to work both for the MATSEC ordinary level passes she attained as well as the studies she is to undertake is key to her success.

5.1.2.2.3 Examination Results are not important

Doanna does not declare her ordinary level passes, as some kind of achievement, but as a mere state of affairs in that she had to do them because they had to be done. She goes about her Maths re-sit in the same manner because the natural consequence of failing an exam is doing a re-sit.

I got 5 O levels: IT, Art, Italian, English and Religion. Next year I will sit for my Maths again.

(Doanna, second interview)

I have got some "needs improvement" in the hairdressing course at MCAST in the practicals. However, I never took that as being a bad thing. I always took them very well and wanted to learn out of that experience. I did very well with Mrs. A. and I had a positive experience.

(Doanna, third interview)

In her experience, at MCAST, she seems to maintain this way of approaching the outcome of her results, and she takes an assessment marked "needs improvement" in her stride. This lack of emotion surrounding Doanna seems to arise from the situation she has at home where it seems that her family are not really interested about her life at all.

I still need to do seven hairdressing assessments. I had a lot of infections and I was not turning up for school because of them. I had eye infections and could not make it. But now I am making up for them for on Thursday I have two assessments and on Monday I have another two.

(Doanna, third interview)

Doanna seems to be very calm about whatever happens in her life and gets on with it as though she has already dealt with issues in life which were much harder than facing examinations. The fact that her parents are both unemployed and that she has a sister who is bedridden seems to indicate that her parents have a lot to think about and that Doanna is used to getting along without their attention. Doanna has in fact learned to do things on her own without any support from her family.

5.1.2.3 Comparing the Old Exams to the New Assignments

With regard to assessment it is the students who follow BTEC courses at MCAST who seem to have undergone the greatest change primarily from a summative system at

secondary school to a formative one at MCAST. Ariana preferred this new system at MCAST in that it decreased the pressure that exams put on her.

I did not really have exams...I had assignments. I had an assignment at least every week. It is true that you have one every week but you study only what you have for that assignment and not everything at once. I feel much better now because I am less stressed and when I study I am not bored because I do not need to do so for long hours. The work is staggered.

(Ariana, second interview)

The first diploma experience was a very fruitful one because the work is divided into little parts which are manageable. The assignments are spread throughout the year and you do not have to deal with everything at one go.

(Ariana, second interview)

Bandura (1997) states that beliefs of personal efficacy directly influence the sense of human agency. Ariana here demonstrates a sense of ownership and manageability of her situation at MCAST in following the IT courses.

Maria on the other hand commented about the bureaucracy that the BTEC system incurs and which she is not very comfortable with. She also points out that she has a lot of work to do and that the only way she copes with this is that she has to keep on smiling in order to succeed. Melissa points out to the time management issue of assignments and that coping with the work is hard.

I must say that I really am not used to the BTEC system. It has too many papers and receipts and it's too complicated.

(Maria, second interview)

I am very very busy but I am OK. I have a lot of assignments to do and so I am stressed but I am OK but I keep smiling. You have to keep smiling otherwise you will not get very far!

(Maria, second interview)

We really have a lot to do right now and we have to deal with everything at once. We have to hand in a lot of assignments at the same time and

we also have a practice interview. We have at least four assignments to hand in. Tomorrow another teacher will be explaining yet another assignment.

(Melissa, second interview)

The issue of assignments does not seem to change as in her final interview, Melissa declares that it is not the content or level of the work which bothers her but the fact that everything seems to have to be handed in together.

There are a lot of things going on at school (MCAST) right now. There are a lot of assignments but it's not because of the actual assignments but it's because they all have to be done together.

(Melissa, third interview)

I think the amount of work that we have to do for the course does not really help. There is too much to do in too little time. All the lecturers hand out their assignments and you really have to struggle in managing everything at one go. Deadlines really kill me. Lecturers would not know what other lecturers are giving out and I suppose that each of them must hand out an assignment at some point.

(Melissa, third interview)

Maria and Melissa portray what Hallam (2010) points out in that they had to adjust to a new concept in assessment. Advancement in their learning could have been complicated by the fact that they were deeply ingrained in a summative-type of assessment during their secondary schooling but this was rapidly changed with a formative, outcome-based type of assessment at MCAST. Although it seems that Hallam (2010) limits the notion of conceptual change to the acquisition of actual subject matter, I feel that the same concept is applicable here. Students find it hard to adjust to a system which employs a different system of assessment and time for this change to be taught and supported needs to be directly planned into the curriculum.

Christine at first criticizes the structure of the AAT course and its pass mark. In her final interview her comments shift towards her problem in living a bit far off from MCAST and in managing the amount of work that she has to do.

AAT is based on examinations and I did not feel that the system is different from when I was at school. I had only one assignment and it was rather difficult because the teacher was a part-timer and he came for the last three months. We had to cover thirty chapters in three months and some of them we had to do all on our own at home. For example the Sage Accounting Programme we could not do anything in the exam because we never used it. This was really silly but we could not do anything! There are AAT rules then that we do not agree with! The pass mark is 80% and if you get a 75% you fail. It is rather difficult, isn't it?

(Christine, second interview)

I am still lagging behind this year because I am in my final year and for being a final year I should be putting in more effort. Because of the fact that I have to travel a long way to come to school, and if for instance I finish at 16.30 before 18.00 I will not be home. And then I really find it difficult to start studying! So I am a little bit behind! I have a dissertation to finish as well and I have my project and this project is really hard. It gives you a case study on a company and then it asks you to analyse it – the employees, the systems! You have to go into the problems and the weaknesses and so on and so forth. It's a fictitious company and the examination board sends it. It's a simulation! So then the next step would be my mock exams in May 2010 and my final AAT exams in June 2010.

(Christine, third interview)

What happened to me was that I sat for my AAT exams last September and I failed one of the three exams. But I have to re-sit them all because the syllabus changed. It's not fair on us because the administration of the Institute of Business and Commerce told us to sit for it in September. We'll see what happens!

(Christine, second interview)

Christine is angry at what happened to her in her AAT exams, but she is bound by the rules and regulations of the examination board and possible mismanagement of the issues at MCAST. Here we see yet another example of “bounded agency” (Evans, 2007), in that Christine is not complacent about what happened, but she shows her anger and disapproval. This reaction, on her part, makes her an active actress and

removes the concentration on structure which in this case is represented by the rules and regulations of the foreign examination board (AAT) and also MCAST.

5.1.2.4 Finding a Learning Status

Ordinary level examinations seem to offer significant statements of self-worth in the Maltese Context. As Chetcuti (2001) points out, the 'O' level examination system in this case was a powerful measure of self-worth resulting in the empowerment of some, but in the elimination of possibilities for others. Those who are successful in their exams are empowered as learners because they are entitled to pursue their own choice of studies at MCAST, at the Higher Secondary and at the Junior College. On the other hand, those who fail these exams are seen as low achievers and are those who cannot learn no matter how much effort teachers have put in training them for these exams. These "failures" are the residue of the system and are those who should find employment because they are no good at studying.

However, in this analysis, I feel that this argument needs to be seen from yet another angle. The measure of academic self-worth with regards to Daniela's case might be on the low side, and has maybe limited her possibilities to sit for other examinations. However, this evaluation is taken from an academic value system and self-worth may not for some people be measured by a successful academic career. Daniela's self-worth has been boosted at work and in her part-time employment, which will be further analysed later on in this chapter. Although for Phoebe the results were positive, she chose to remain in employment rather than to pursue an academic career. A worthwhile job in some of these people's eyes may result in empowerment and success, which might not always be equated to success measured in academic terms.

The work proposed by Hallam (2010) is particularly significant to the understanding of this theme in that it focuses entirely on the experience of transition and its impact on the development of expertise.. However, motivation is not only necessary to understand the subject content, but students must also be motivated to understand the new assessment system, with the latter being crucial for the participants to be successful. “Bounded agency” (Evans, 2007) and “personal efficacy” (Bandura, 1997), are also applicable in that the participants have to contend with the structural influences of the college and the examination boards in order to run an assessment system.

5.1.3 Preparation for Further Education and/or Work

Literature such as the work by Anderson, (1997); Sultana (1989; 2003); Eisner, (1985); and Debono et al., (2007), points to the fact that students in general are poorly prepared by their schools for the life that follows compulsory schooling. For the participants in this study, there seems to have been some sort of preparation, but this seems to be laden with hidden agendas. Participants focused on issues in relation to the kind of information, which was given to them, which seems to indicate that there are hidden and null curricula (Eisner, 1985) at play. Maltese Educators seem to be applying their own structure, as past University of Malta students, to their own students by implying that they should be aiming for the Junior College and University rather than opting for MCAST. To some teachers, MCAST seems to be a second class option reminiscent of the times when technical people were deemed to be less academically able. Two of the participants point out that MCAST was deliberately left out of the school visits that were organised. Participants also speak about ways in which they were dissuaded from taking up certain subject options in that MCAST was portrayed as being the worst option. The way that participants described this gave rise to the development of the second subtheme as distinct from the anger of students in not being able to visit

MCAST. Daniela and Melissa in fact criticise the quality of information which was given to students about MCAST. Moreover participants also talked about the lack of preparation that they had for the world of work and they defined this as a “leap into the dark” which gave rise to the third and final subtheme. The data giving rise to this theme in general thus points out that secondary schools orient students towards an academic career whilst ignoring preparation and guidance for other career pathways that students would be more inclined to follow.

5.1.3.1 Perceived Options for Junior Lyceum Students

Melissa and Ariana point out that it is as though teachers want to discourage students from going to MCAST because they are scared that the “good” student might opt for the easy way out. However, they both indicate that they feel left out and they think that their school is not preparing them for their own choice which was going to be MCAST.

For MCAST they did not prepare me at all. They prepare you for sitting 'O' levels and to go to Junior College. They took us to University! They did not even take us to Junior College and not even to Higher Secondary or to ETC. They prepare you to take 'A' levels and to go to University. They do not even tell you that at MCAST there are certain courses. When I went to the guidance counsellor to ask about the kindergarten course she said that I would go to MCAST so that at least I'll have somewhere to go and there would be something for me to do.

(Melissa, first interview)

In fact the school did not organize a visit to MCAST and we all had to go to the other places which interested the other students. It seems that at the school they don't really want us to go to MCAST but I am doing my utmost for them to take us and I told the assistant head and some others and they told us that they would try.

(Ariana, first interview)

Melissa and Ariana are not only aware of the situation with regard to the obscuring of MCAST from the list of possibilities but are also reacting to it and the latter

actually takes action by asking the assistant head of school to organize a visit. Once again this seems to be an example of “bounded agency” (Evans, 2007). Bounded agency, sees the actresses as having a past and imagined future possibilities which guide and shape actions in the present. This is done together with subjective perceptions of structure they have to negotiate within social landscapes which affect how they act. The past for Melissa and Ariana is one of five full years within a certain secondary school culture whilst the future is a course of studies at MCAST. Both past and future have guided their thoughts and actions in negotiating a deal with their secondary school authorities in that a visit to MCAST had to be organised.

5.1.3.2 Impressions of the Available Options

Daniela adopts a much more passive stance but also like Melissa criticizes the quality of the information given to them about MCAST. The information-giving session was rushed and the quality was poor also outlining a further hidden agenda since students are given a very bad first impression of the quality of education given at MCAST. In the previous subtheme, the counsellor in Melissa’s case told her that she could go to MCAST because she would have something to do as she did not have any other option because of the bad performance she always gave in her results. Daniela stated that teachers actually told them that going to University is the best option out of all the schools and although they would actually need to go to Junior College prior to entering University, the school still organized a visit there rather than taking them to MCAST.

They did come to speak to us at school but I do not think that they informed us that well. They did not even take us (to MCAST) because we only went to university. It’s like you really have to see the environment. They encouraged us much more to go to University than to go to other schools. They stress that university is more ideal than MCAST or ITS (Institute of Tourism Studies).

(Daniela, first interview)

When the speaker from MCAST came he said he had a lot to tell us about and not enough time to do the job properly and he was trying to go over everything. He came when we had a lesson and break. During break everyone wanted to leave and he stopped because he had to go elsewhere...and for kindergarten I don't even know what he said. Not even one sentence!

(Melissa, first interview)

Other students spoke about the lack of preparation but were less concerned about it. This might mean that it is somewhat obvious that their school would not prepare them for MCAST because it would not do and would not be associated to anything for those who were deemed to be low achievers and it would not encourage any students to pursue a career through the vocational route. Although this policy is never actually stated, it is evidently part of the implicit curriculum (Eisner, 1985) which is being perceived by the students.

5.1.3.3 Preparation for Life Outside School

Another aspect which seems to be totally ignored in preparing students for transition is their preparation for employment. Kirsty speaks about a very bad experience that she had when employed as a delicatessen assistant right after she finished her fifth form. She states that school has not in any way equipped her for the world of work both with regard to the actual job and also with regard to the work dynamics between employees.

I feel that school does not prepare you for work. I had a very bitter experience and you cannot open up with anyone (at work) because everyone gets to know about everything. The work I did was really hard for me.

(Kirsty, second interview)

The experience gained by Kirsty might have encouraged her to carry on with her studies and has perhaps facilitated a positive learning identity at the expense of a negative work experience. However, it seems that she grew up in a sheltered environment where sharing experiences seemed to be the right thing to do. Such behaviour however was automatically generalised to her place of work which ultimately led to her being bullied. The preparation intended here refers to those skills one needs in order to be successful at work which are not necessarily part of the actual job but which are needed for successful integration with other work colleagues.

Students are thus experiencing “a leap into the dark” due to the lack of knowledge about tertiary education choices. They talk about a certain fear of the unknown as they do not know what to find when they leave school and thus feel somewhat lost. Such a situation might also motivate students to purposely apply to go to schools about which they know nothing of just for the sake of standing out and being different to the rest of their cohort. Hallam (2010) points out that research carried out by Green (1997) and Mizelle and Mullins (1997) indicates that students could cope better if they had been given more challenging work in their previous school and had been taught more strategies for working independently. Daniela and Kirsty talk about their lack of preparation for the life they were about to embark on and about making and finding new friends.

I do not like going to a new place and not knowing anything about it so I wish that the school took us there.

(Daniela, first interview)

Because I'll have new friends and I would not know what to find there. The school is different...and I really worry at times.

(Kirsty, first interview)

Phoebe hints at a loss of belonging, stability and security that she will have to undergo and which her current school is able to give her. She points to the different structure that she would have to adapt to and points out that she is very scared of the change.

In the beginning we used to say that we could not wait to be in Form 5 and now that it is here we don't even believe it! I am scared of the change that I have to face a real real lot. That sense of security that school gives me. (Year after year) The fact that you have the same teachers and the same friends. It's like a second home and after all it is no joke because we are here from half-eight to three in the afternoon and you are here with them for the majority of the day.

(Phoebe, first interview)

This might mean that some students manage to cope with change imposed by temporal constraints and schooling structures in a natural way whilst for others adapting might be harder. Hallam (2010) states that emotions are crucial in determining the way that transitions between or within learning environments are negotiated. On one end there may be unhappiness about leaving some things behind but this is coupled with positive anticipation of new activities also accompanied by a certain degree of concern. Although most literature focuses on the transition from primary to secondary education, these participants seem to indicate that emotions have a significant role to play even during the later stages of adolescence.

5.1.3.4 The Preparation of Junior Lyceum Students for Further Education and/or Work

These excerpts have highlighted the experience of the student with regard to their preparation for life after compulsory education. This can refer to what Eisner (1985) terms as “implicit” and “null” curricula. The language used, the examination structure, as

well as ways in which students are prepared, give an implicit message where MCAST, ITS and work seem to be portrayed, as choices considered less favourable to the Junior College, in preparation for University. The fact that the school chooses not to organize or ignores the possibility of organizing visits to MCAST reflects a “null curriculum”. The “null curriculum” is about what schools do not teach and as Eisner (1985) states; the participants show that not teaching can be as important as teaching. The repercussions of not teaching about MCAST in this case have created further exclusion for these students. One can also argue that the profile of the Maltese teacher working in primary and secondary schools is usually an individual who has never left school. After finishing compulsory education and attaining an adequate amount of ordinary levels, s/he would proceed to Junior College or a sixth form and subsequently read for a degree at the University of Malta. Very few of them would have experienced a working life outside school, so acknowledging that some individuals might cherish success in other ventures dissimilar to the own, which they are accustomed to, is perhaps inconceivable. Furthermore access to Junior College rather than the world of work or MCAST is seen as being more prestigious and a welcome achievement for the student, who attended a secondary school. Consequently it seems that while MCAST has opened up access courses for students who did not achieve their MATSEC ordinary level passes, and also courses at higher levels also at MCAST, the front liners who are the secondary-school educators, and who are in reality working with the students, still think that this is the route to take once access to the Junior College is academically denied. Students who were interested in attending a course at MCAST asked for a visit to the college premises, but they were ignored as though such a route should be hidden from the eyes of the student. It is almost as though our educators want to discourage students from going to MCAST, because they are scared that the “good” student might opt for the easy way out. The creation of MCAST, thus in the eyes of the teacher, who was educated at

the University of Malta, is seen as alternative option for the ones who failed, and who therefore can go to MCAST to revise their studies and to be given a second chance. This is portrayed as a golden opportunity, which delays immediate entry into employment once compulsory education is over, and which is amenable following the issue of the ordinary level examination results. Sultana (1989) points out that transition education was created as an attempt to retain unemployed youth in education. This seems to serve the interest of a state in crisis, as it is easier to address youth and education and to blame them for the poor situation, rather than look at the resources and try to address the economy.

In relation to ordinary level examinations Chetcuti (2001) points out that these do seem to curtail possibilities for some students, particularly those who are really interested in pursuing their studies. The fact that the University of Malta does not accept UK NVQ Level 3 Courses followed at MCAST and which are equivalent to three 'A' levels as entry requirements, creates another stumbling block for these students. Wyn and Dwyer (2000) state that this is still reminiscent of the past in that there was only one route linked to only one career. Bourdieu (1990) in fact talks about structure, which in this case is mediating between objectivity and subjectivity, and is thus the lens with which each individual approaches life in general. The individuals I apply this to are the teachers who are acting on past structures, and who base their guidance to students entirely on their own past experience as students. The resistance shown by the University of Malta in accepting qualifications offered by MCAST is also exacerbating these mindsets. Here structure is a dynamic cause and effect and it can be seen as structured structure and as a structuring structure (Grenfell and James, 1998). The structured structure is the actual system where the Junior College and the University of Malta fall short of accepting alternative qualifications other than the traditional ones. This

in turn perpetuates a structuring structure where the mindsets of the Maltese educators working in the secondary school system prepare students only for entry into Junior College prior to entry at the University. The structured and structuring structures are thus continuously feeding themselves in the interest of maintaining a status quo. This status quo has in fact brought about the need for introducing higher national diplomas and top-up degree courses at MCAST.

Pallas (1992) in Ecclestone (2009) views transitions as social systems rather than as attributes of a person's life course. For Pallas (1992:172) educational attainment is determined by movement through "an ordered sequence of educational transitions." This ordered sequence is carefully prepared and maintained by the Maltese educator with a specific agenda which perpetrates the linear transitions of the past.

5.1.4 Making Choices

This section of analysis deals with what these students think about attending post-secondary educational institutions and about what choice of school and subjects might be right for them in terms of their aspirations. As indicated in Chapter 2 and as highlighted in previous sections of this chapter, on completion of compulsory education, students may either opt for full-time employment or may further their studies.

Participants spoke about how they made their choices and about how being female oriented their choice. The first subtheme develops around Christine's discourse who is very resolute in her decision not to attend University since she intends to raise her own family and has no intention to leave her children with their grandparents. For Christine investing so much in education would be a waste of time, when she knows that she will eventually stay at home in order to raise her own kids. The data also contains

verbalised thoughts about the reputation carried by the available tertiary institutions, and this was also influential on choice. In fact, some educational institutions were not deemed to be of good quality and participants eliminated them, as a choice in order not to waste their time. A further subtheme which emerged deals with opinions about the physical or environmental ambience within these institutions and this was deemed to be important to the participants' motivation to study. Choices also rested on the participants' individual aptitudes and subject interests, and also on how certain subject choices were denied to them throughout their secondary school studies. In retrospect, participants speak about them being happier in their studies and in their current choices should they have been allowed to take the subjects they wanted. It is important to note that here I explore the perceptions that these students have on full-time tertiary education opportunities. However, one must point out that the sample of participants was chosen on the basis that these students intended to come to MCAST and so the position of those who had other options in mind was automatically eliminated.

5.1.4.1 Eliminating Possibilities

Christine maintains that it is useless to aspire to go to university because she intends to have a family and she does not wish to leave her children with grandparents. She thinks that investing so much in her education by going to university for a degree is useless because she would not reap the fruit of her effort since she does not intend to work in order to be able to raise her own children. She also seems to rule university out because she thinks that having a career and being a mother at the same time are not possible. Indirectly it seems that her mother was a role model for her in this case.

I don't wish to get into university because I want to raise a family and my mother was always here for us...do you understand? It's nice to have kids and not to leave them with grandparents and to raise them yourself. I do

not wish to do 'A' levels and universities. I just want a course and to start working.

(Christine, second interview)

Here Bourdieu's (1990) notion of structuring structure is once again evident. Christine does not want to invest that much in her career by going to University as she is a female and is willing to give this up in order to take care of her own family in due course. This structuring structure fuels the structured structure in endorsing the fact that child care is a duty for females, who should give up the opportunity of having a career for this purpose.

In her final interview, although Christine anticipates that she will be successful in attaining her AAT qualification, her opinion does not change. Although Christine does not say so, it seems that her mother is still her most influential role model and although she is a successful student, she identifies with the role of her mother as being the main care giver of the family. She not only knows that she has a choice, that is of furthering her studies and even getting access to University but also chooses to deny herself the possibility of getting the right to choose.

I chose MCAST because I did not want to go to university and I did not want to have to renounce my career to raise a family so I avoided having to take this decision. That is what I think about taking the ACCA in fact. I want a family so it will not be worthwhile to study so much because I would like to raise my own kids. My mother influenced me a lot in this kind of reasoning. When I was still in secondary school, she had to work and we could feel her absence from home. She was unhappy too and because she worked with the family, it was even tougher. Now I feel much better because I go home and find my mother always there. It's not because I find dinner ready or something of the sort but because you would be able to chat a little before I go upstairs to start my homework. The fact that I would get my ACCA and also having a boyfriend are not competing issues as I know that this is quite possible. However, actually doing the ACCA is still a big question mark for me because having my own family is more important.

(Christine, second interview)

However, Christine also views the family as being restrictive and thinks that she should study to a certain degree so that she is not completely tied down to the family business. During her first interview, she thinks that hairdressing is an interesting avenue as it would provide her with the opportunity of working independently but she states that she would only take this up as the last option.

I like early years, business and accounts. I would have a job already with the AAT (accounting technician) course but I do not wish to work in the family business as they would keep you from advancing. The accountant who works for my family encourages me to go to school and to keep on learning. I will take up hairdressing only if I do not do well in business. However, I like it a lot because I am capable of doing my own hair.
(Christine, first interview)

Christine's avoidance of university seems to be tied down to the influence she has over the care giving role taken up by her mother. There seems to have been a shift in the intention of preparing these girls for employment in secondary schools by providing them with the same curriculum as that offered to boys. Therefore differences in the eyes of the educators do not seem to stem from gender differences, but from distinctions in academic capability.

Distinction in gender (Darmanin, 2006) may then still be felt for employment opportunities, but it should not be that evident in the educational preparation that these girls are receiving. Nevertheless the tertiary options for females may be curtailed by the duties that their families and society at large may expect them to undertake in that career options should fit around their main duty of taking care of the household. It is a known fact that almost 100% of kindergarten teachers in Malta are female and that a definite majority of primary school teachers particularly teaching the lower grades are also female. These jobs are deemed to belong to females because they are associated

to young children, because teachers work shorter hours, and because it is also assumed that any female would be in charge of her own family.

5.1.4.2 Ensuring a Valid Time Investment

Melissa on the other hand thinks that attending Junior College is a complete waste of time. Melissa and Kirsty point out that at the Junior College students are not followed up and it is up to them to make sure that they attend lectures. Therefore they are in a certain sense expected to be more responsible and they are awarded a greater degree of independence. Students seem to have more flexibility at the Junior College because they are allowed about three unexplained absences per month without losing any portion of their stipend. Although Melissa thinks that at MCAST the case is somewhat the same, this is a fallacious impression because MCAST students have a deduction in their stipend even if they miss out on a single lecture.

They (educational institutions) are all interesting but for example I am not interested in Junior College. I don't think that it is my type because you really have to be independent and so on. I think I will be better at higher secondary because I would feel much more comfortable because it is like a secondary school and you would feel on the same level.

(Kirsty, first interview)

They tell me a lot about Junior College. My friends told me that at Junior College they started to fall behind because they you can just walk out of the class. I think that at MCAST it is the same but at Junior College they say that it is worse. They waste a lot of time over there and they waste their lives because after two years they still end up at MCAST. I know a lot who have been to Junior College and who then come to MCAST! That is why I am telling you this!

(Melissa, first interview)

The thing which frightens me the most is the fact that at school they insist a lot that we study and then I think that when we will go to Junior College and MCAST lecturers will not do so. A friend of mine who went to Junior College told me that she spent two years asleep.

(Daniela, first interview)

Students also have their own ideas about what they would find at MCAST.

Although Ariana thinks that she was not really given any information, she found this out for herself by visiting the premises on her own steam and by asking their friends.

It (Institute of ICT) seems to be a good Institute. I think it's the best one I've seen because they did not tell me the same thing about Junior College and I want to do computing. And I managed to go to ICT on my own and I managed to see it!

(Ariana, first interview)

I was at Msida doing my course with one of the training providers because there wasn't enough space for us on the main campus. I enjoyed it here as well.

(Ariana, second interview)

In reality Ariana did not attend the actual ICT premises owing to the amount of student intake that year which exceeded the number of available places. Nevertheless she was offered a place at a private training partner (PTP) in a completely different location which she attended with success. Therefore it seems that her first impressions at the Institute of Communication Technology were further endorsed by her experience at the PTP.

The style of choice portrayed here by Ariana, Christine, Kirsty, Daniela and Melissa seems to be close to what Ball et al. (1996) define as “Newcomers”. They are attentive to role stereotypes, gossip, rumour and the media operating in the schools and have strong views based on their own experience at school. They speak about their choice as outsiders.

On the contrary, Phoebe at first indicates a preference for attending Junior College than Higher Secondary and this is because she is under the impression that at the Higher Secondary she thinks that she will be repeating the same subjects she took

during her secondary education. At that time, she declared that if she should not manage to gain entrance to the Junior College, she would then opt for MCAST. However, she then also states that she would not like to attend University and that she prefers to go to MCAST because ultimately she thinks that at Junior College she would have to learn subjects that she does not like owing to the ways in which the options are structured. This seems to tie in to the concept of “bounded agency” depicted by Evans (2002: 2007). In this case Phoebe who is the actor has past and imagined future possibilities, and with her past as a student she is able to make up her own mind and to takes decisions in relation to the experience of subjects, which she already studied throughout her secondary education.

Higher Secondary I will not attend for sure and I would rather go to Junior College. If I would not manage to pass my 'O' levels I would then go to MCAST but definitely not Higher Secondary. I do not want to repeat what I have done at school already. I do not have anything against it but it does not really attract me that much.

(Phoebe, first interview)

Phoebe perceives that the Junior College will be a re-enactment of what she has experienced in her secondary school and so she does not waste time on that in order to eventually take up studies which are more interesting to her.

5.1.4.3 Choosing the Right Learning Environment

Choosing appropriate environments was deemed to be a salient factor for the participants. The data revealed that choice in this respect emanated from two very diverse reasons. The first relates to the physical environment and whether this is pleasant enough to attract the participant to attend on a daily basis whilst the second focuses on whether the type of institution is suitable for a certain type of learner.

5.1.4.3.1 Choosing the Right Ambience

Maria seems to be of the “Disconnected” type (Ball et al., 1996) of choosers in that she seems to be influenced by the environment of the school and has little ability to understand or interpret the language of teachers. Recent refurbishment of MCAST has helped it to be a favourite amongst those who are unable to look beyond a building façade. In fact Maria chooses to attend the newest block n the MCAST campus

No Junior College does not interest me. For one thing I think it is really ugly and I really do not like the environment. If the environment is not pleasing then I am sure that I will not study. I will get disheartened.
(Maria, first interview)

Everyone praises MCAST and says that it is very nice. The environment looks very nice and it looks OK from the outside. The teachers help you. I imagine that there is a library and a canteen. I think that it is good.
(Christine, first interview)

Christine seems to endorse what Maria is stating about ambience but for her this is a secondary issue compared to her intentions behind the choice of the AAT course.

5.1.4.3.2 Choosing a “hands-on” approach

Phoebe, Daniela and Maria clearly indicate that MCAST is more suitable for them because they are not the studious, brainy type. The implications here are twofold: The first is that they see themselves as poor academic performers and the other is that at MCAST what is learnt is of a lesser difficulty than what is covered at other institutions. Maria however goes one step further in indicating that the type of learning at MCAST should be more hands-on and practical.

I want to go to MCAST because it goes down as a level not like Junior College I am not the brainy type who likes to study and so it caters for my needs.
(Phoebe, first interview)

I never wanted to go to University....at least till now! I think that MCAST is in reality more at my level. I think I would be a success story at MCAST because at Junior College I would have to learn subjects which do not interest me at all.

(Phoebe, first interview)

I think that MCAST is not very difficult and I think that if you work hard it should not be difficult to continue with your studies.

(Daniela, first interview)

There are a lot of youngsters who are very bright and Junior College is there in preparation for university and I am sure that I will not go there...do you understand? Therefore I am sure that I will not go there because it is not good for me.

(Maria, first interview)

From MCAST I would expect them to take us out on work placement at least once a week so that we would learn how to deal with work. I hope that there will not be a lot of theory and information because I would rather have practice than theory and writing.

(Maria, first interview)

Maria looks at MCAST as her only choice given that results and schooling in general have always given her the message that she is below average in her capabilities. Reading and writing are seen as tasks which should be given to those who are bright whilst for those who are like her, hands-on experience would be more suitable. This is clearly expressed above also indicating that there is a certain degree of emotional involvement in what she states.

This section draws a number of issues together. The participants here give an indication that they have internalised the discourse of their teachers in that the second best option is more suited to them as they are weak learners. This is coupled by a further internalisation which refers to the broader perception that since courses are more of a practical nature, then by default they should be easier and that long hours of study should not be needed.

5.1.4.4 Aptitude

Ariana is interested in pursuing a career in computing and this seems to be mainly influenced by the way she sees herself employed in the future. It may also be influenced by the fact that she has always been a better student in Maths and Physics and that she always found languages rather difficult. Therefore Ariana's choice is informed by her likes and abilities in school subjects. Interestingly she makes no mention of the job opportunities that a career in IT would open up for her even though the government is investing and doing its utmost to attract foreign investment in the area by means of the Smart City Project.

I try to study Italian and Spanish but I just cannot remember anything. Languages worry me. I am much better in physics and computer. In maths I did not do so well this time but I will make up for it.

(Ariana, first interview)

I am not interested in anything except computing.

(Ariana, first interview)

I have no idea what I will be doing in 10 years time but it will have to be something related to computers.

(Ariana, second interview)

Phoebe also reconsiders attending Junior College after having worked for a year but she declares that she is not sure whether she would like to go because she wants to study or because she wants to stay with her friends. She prefers to stay as she is in the world of work and would leave only to study what she is really interested in which is merchandising.

I thought of entering Junior College this year. But I was not sure that I was really interested in studying. I think I was more interested in being with my friends. And so it's not worth it because then I would lose interest and leave. I want subjects that I really want to study. I want to know all about merchandising. At work we had courses about merchandising and afterwards I followed up my research on the internet to see how shops are doing this abroad.

(Phoebe, second interview)

Both Phoebe and Ariana seem to be of the “goal-oriented privileged chooser type” (Ball et al., 1996). They manage to keep aloof and to critically evaluate the meaning and value of impressions and information. Their choices are guided by goals in that they intend to study even though one of them is in full-time employment. Phoebe eliminates the “person-oriented” course of action as she thinks that she would leave work to go to Junior College because of her friends and that this would not be a wise choice. This is possibly elicited from the fact that there is a lot of choice and therefore she is left with a compromise decision.

5.1.4.5 Availability of Subject Choices

Daniela and Melissa found limitations arising out of subject choice and availability at school. This is portrayed by them as follows:

I had a lot of options about my career and I really did try to find out. At first I want to become a speech therapist and I told them that I wanted that career over here but they did not tell me that I needed biology and chemistry so I did not take them....because you must know about the mouth. I always wanted to take up hairdressing or beauty therapy but there are too many of them now. I would like to go to Junior College now but this depends on the 'O' levels that I will get.

(Daniela, first interview)

I did not really want to choose physical education (PE) but I did because I wanted to become a kindergarten assistant. I also chose home economics so that I would study child care and crafts but there were too few who chose it and the same for crafts. So then I chose social studies and biology and then they told me that once again there were too few who chose social studies so I couldn't. So I chose PE. I did not want these subjects. I am not even going to sit for biology because I am not really good in it. What I wanted the most were home economics and crafts, I had crafts in form one....I never had home economics...I think it would be of great help to have home economics for child care. This really makes me angry because there would be someone who would have home economics and crafts and she would know more than I do.

(Melissa, first interview)

Here it seems that the system punished Melissa and Daniela in several ways. Daniela did not take up the subjects she needed for the career that she desired to follow. When she realized that she did not have the right subjects, it was then too late. On the other hand Melissa, did her utmost to take the subject options that she desired but these were not offered to her due to the small numbers. This is one of the difficulties faced by educators in small island states where the resources are limited and the student to teacher ratio must be high enough for a subject to be offered. This is a system which rewards conformity since students who are inclined towards the most popular subjects would be rewarded. Both students are aware that this limitation might have repercussions on their future careers and are resentful that it happened. Thus, the system rewarded the talented few (Darmanin, 1992) but has cooled out the possibilities for Melissa and Daniela.

Another factor in relation to choice that was touched upon during the final interview was the realisation that choices are narrowed down the older one becomes. In the interview excerpts below she states that she would have gone to the Institute of Art and Design, if she knew how to draw but she could not. She also mentions that she would have liked to focus more on make-up than what is possible for her now, because she has too many commitments with her full-time course and also with her part-time work. Maria also mentioned that, if she got better grades, she would not have chosen the National Diploma in Health Studies but the National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development but her grades were not good enough.

If I had to make another choice and I knew how to draw I would have gone to Art and Design and so I cannot go. I would have also focused more on make-up than what is possible for me now.

(Maria, third interview)

I chose health studies and not early years, however, not because I did not want to work with children but because I did not get enough marks for entry into the course. Otherwise I would have chosen early years!
(Maria, third interview)

For those who are interested in doing the same courses that I did, I would tell them: "Don't you dare!" But I don't think that everyone is of the same opinion as I am. Those who like to study would want to come. Those who are like me and do not like studying would say no! Mind you I found myself better without exams at MCAST.
(Maria, third interview)

Maria also hints at the fact that she was made to study what she did not really want to do, owing to the forced choice that she had. When speaking about placements, she also talks about the fact that she did not like working as a carer, and for the Health Studies Diploma, which is supposed to be a level higher, she ended up doing the same work. Therefore here she is not only alluding to the fact that she thought that it was much easier, but she is also considering whether it is really worth it to further her studies in something she does not really want to do. Hallam (2010) also states that transitions can pre-empt decisions about the areas of expertise to be developed. Maria's impression of the Health Studies Course was that it was a waste of time since for one of the placements, she merely repeated what was going on during the First Diploma. For this reason amongst the fact that she needs more money to save up in order to get married, she works as a baby sitter and also as a salesgirl. Here, what Ashforth (2001) portrays as being an either-or situation with regard to personal change or role innovation is not applicable. Maria does not undergo personal change and does not resolve into changing herself as an individual, in order to be able to survive the working environment. She also does not enact or is probably incapable of enacting "role innovation", which entails adapting the role to fit oneself. Maria performs neither personal change nor role innovation but resorts to pursuing interests and activities outside of the course.

In hindsight, Doanna also regrets having registered for the first year at MCAST with the Institute of Communication Technology. She would have preferred if she had a year of practice in hairdressing by attending the Foundation in Hairdressing Course as a preparatory course for the City and Guilds Diploma in Hairdressing which she is about to attain.

I would not have gone to ICT if I had to make changes. I would have done the foundation year in hairdressing. Even though I have 'O' levels I would have done the foundation year. These two years have literally flown by and I really enjoyed them. I did not feel that I was coming to school at all because I also had salon practice during the week and then we also had salon practice at school.

(Doanna, third interview)

5.1.4.6 Can choices really be made?

Impressions are thus shaped by a myriad of influences, namely friends, the perception of MCAST, as being a “second chance opportunity” and the impression that MCAST is not as hard as the Junior College, as well as participants’ plans for the future. The expectation that MCAST will be different to secondary school was also portrayed. The “intended”, “actual” and “received” message typology used to analyse formal transition programmes delivered in New Zealand Schools (Sultana, 1989) is still useful to use as a basis for discussion here, even though there is no formal transition programme in Maltese Schools. In the eyes of these students, MCAST seems to open new avenues for learning for them as being one particular type of learner who does not aspire to follow an academic route and who is not deemed to be “bright”. However, this is not the only argument. Whilst Ball et al. (2000) point out in the case of Amma, who does not want to go to college because “no one really wants to learn”(2000: 27), in Malta we see that students would rather aim to go to MCAST immediately rather than go to Junior College and end up wasting their time. Therefore attending a vocational college in Malta seems to be also spurred by a desire to learn according to one’s aptitude and also for a sense

of urgency in not wasting any time at the Junior College which seems to be a difficult school.

5.1.5 The Impact of Teachers on Students' Lives

In this study a substantial amount of data focused on the teachers and lecturers insights about the ways in which some educators were perceived by their students. The dearth of data collected about teachers highlights the importance that these individuals have in the life of their students. Participants talk about the behaviour of some of their teachers and mainly describe them as being either dedicated or unprepared. Doanna and Christine emphasise the personal attention they got from their teachers whilst Maria talks about the difficulties that she had because she was not one of those who could be classified as well-behaved. Roles and responsibilities of teachers and students within the learning process were also described. When the students talked about failing in subjects at times, they blamed the teacher(s) who taught them. Daniela points out that her teachers did not prepare any lessons for the class, because they preferred to chat rather than teach since it was one of the lower streams. She states that her class was always discriminated against and that her teachers did not expect that much from them. Furthermore, participants also spoke about their own effort in the learning process in that the teachers' responsibility is bound by limitations should the student not prove to be an active learning participant. Maria, in fact, states that students should be responsible for following up what teachers had explained by studying at home. The participants also spoke about the general school climate and how this impinged on their learning. Christine talks about the ways in which school structures create climates between teachers and students. She states that the climate at the secondary school was warmer because everything was carried out within one building block whilst at MCAST keeping contact was harder. Moreover, lecturers at MCAST treated students as adults and most

of them felt that this was hard to adjust to. Hence the overall theme, concerning experiences and thoughts, formulated out of these experiences, constitutes a number of subthemes arising out of the descriptions of the teachers' behaviour, the responsibility of teachers in the learning process, students' efforts enabling learning to occur and general school climates.

5.1.5.1 Teachers' Behaviour

Participants showed disapproval of the behaviour of some of their teachers both during their secondary education as well as at MCAST. At this point participants are mature enough to recognise when a teacher acted professionally or otherwise.

There were some teachers that I did not get along with. This year I did really badly in business studies because I really did not study. I did study but in reality I did not really give it that much importance. And the teacher told me that I got that mark because she added on marks here and there. She did so because she wanted to and not because I asked her too. If she did not want to she should have avoided doing it and she should not have told everyone. Some teachers are.....but there are others that like me and who listen to me.

(Christine, first interview)

I found it difficult at times because of the teachers and friends. The Art Teacher picked on me and used to give me a hard time.

(Doanna, first interview)

Both Doanna and Christine, received personal attention from their teachers. Being liked by teachers on a personal basis seems important to them, and being picked upon unnecessarily were deemed to be difficult experiences, which they had to overcome. Maria on the other hand refers to her experiences as being part of a group as she is not of the "quiet type". She then talks about a mistake on her result sheet, which is a significant personal issue, as she was going to be placed in what is deemed to be the worst class of the whole school.

I had difficulties with teachers yes. They do not explain and ignore us. You must understand that I am not of the quiet type. Once I sat for an exam and I got a mark on the sixties and they marked me absent by mistake. (In Secondary) they were going to put me in Class 506 which is the worst class and my parents had to come to put things right.

(Maria, first interview)

The teachers are different in the ways in which they manage their work with us! With Mr. B. We work very well but with Mr. A.....he spent two terms of the year doing nothing and now he is dishing out everything at one go. For Unit 38 he has not given us anything yet. For Public Health which is Unit 12 he only gave us the assignment. For Genetics which is Unit 34 he gave us one assignment and we handed it in over two months ago and it has not come back as yet! Sometimes he would not feel like doing a lecture and he tells us to take this lecture a little bit easy. But I would say, however, if you have a lot to do, roll up your sleeves and do it! With Ms. T. we are moving on and we have very little to cover. With Ms. D, we are ready. With Mr. J, don't even tell me what the unit is about because I don't have a clue. I did not understand anything with him because all we did was play. We played Killer – do you know what that is? He only came to see us once on placement on the very last day almost!

(Maria, second interview)

Most of the lecturers took it easy for the first two terms and then they expect to bombard us with the syllabus so that they cover everything! It's not fair because we get tired! The thing that stresses me out is that all the assignments are then given to us at the end of the year. Then the teachers think that you only have to prepare for their unit! In fact I have to hand in three assignments on one day!

(Maria, second interview)

She criticizes her lecturers for the lack of management that they have in issuing assignments, which all seem to fall towards the end of the year. This is considered to be one of the main stressors for both herself as well as her friends. She is also able to compare the performance of some of the lecturers to the rest.

Cassar (2009) points to the fact that the hidden curriculum will be found in schools in a variety of forms and in different levels of intensity, but it is rarely absent. Relationships that are developed between teachers, administrators and students reflect the same kinds of the relationships which students then develop as adults when they

eventually start working. The lack of control perceived by students over their own work and the extrinsic motivation via grades all reflect a capitalist productive process. As highlighted further on in the chapter, this is inextricably linked to the effects that streaming of students has on the motivational process in learning and its recreation of the social structure. Maria points to an important aspect within her secondary school. It is known that class 506 are a difficult class and her parents did their utmost so that she would not be placed within it. The real reasons for which Maria's parents complained to the school for placing her in the "worst" class cannot really be uncovered in this research. Her parents were successful in avoiding such a situation for their daughter. It seems that if the school was not on Maria's side, then her parents were. It would be interesting to explore whether the parents of those students who were in 506 knew about the history of this class and whether they would bother to do anything about the situation for the sake of their daughters.

5.1.5.2: The Teachers' Effort.

Some of the participants seem to allocate the responsibility for not understanding in class entirely to their teacher. They seem to fail to take into account their role in the cause of such behaviour. They seem to associate subjects with teachers.

The subject I could never learn was history because I do not think that she teaches it well and even social studies. I think that everyone sees this teacher in the same way because she would pick on you ...she is that type who really makes us nervous wrecks so everyone ignores her. The history teacher is a joker and we rarely do the lesson because we would start a discussion on something else. I never could understand anything about history with the guy but I did with other teachers who taught me the same subject in the past. The teacher really influences me.

(Melissa, first interview)

Daniela puts an emphasis on the fact that her difficulties at school arose almost entirely from the teachers' end. Moreover, she thinks that the quality of the teaching is regressing at a faster rate year after year.

Yes I found a lot of difficulty in this school with particular reference to the teachers.....it's always from the frying pan into the fire. They are going from bad to worse year after year. There are some of them who prefer to chat rather than to give a lesson. There are some who should not be teaching as they do not know anything. There are some of them who are a total loss in certain areas. There was a teacher for example who told a student "I can't stand you" in her face. I think that the school has gone really fallen behind from when Ms. S. has left. Order in the school is very important. I really hurt when I think that I have not been given the same treatment as the brighter students. I think it's really unfair that they always grouped me with those students who cause trouble. I do not think that we are less capable than the others anyway. After all when it came to creativity, we were the ones to come up with the ideas! There were very few teachers who really appreciated us. The rest were all commenting about us. There are some who ignore us whilst others control us and manage to teach us. There are some who think we are stupid and they ignore us. The first two weeks of the school year were ok whilst the rest.....!!

(Daniela, first interview)

All the students mention one particular teacher or another, but Daniela criticizes the system and the ways in which the school at large discriminated against the class she was always assigned to. Daniela not only comments on the teachers' performance but also criticizes the way in which her particular class was always discriminated against. This seems to endorse what Harris and Rosenthal (1990) have to say about the teacher-expectancy effect where this is reflected in two ways. The first way is the decision by administrators, who might assign teachers to this class, who are less willing to make an effort. The second might be the teachers' own decision not to do their utmost with this class, because it was expected to perform badly no matter how hard they try. This reflects the way in which a stratified learning environment creates problems of engaging with students (Kelly, 2009). Streaming creates a situation where the teacher is a loner in

the classroom since all the students in the lower streams would require a considerable amount of attention, more often than not, in different areas of learning with the use of different educational strategies. In such situations, educators lose their stamina since it is impossible to give students the skills they need for success. Thus, as discussed earlier on in this section, streaming creates a microcosm of the social structure of society. Less energy and resources are devoted to weaker students in that this is deemed useless as they will still fail or be failed by the system. Daniela points out that the Head of School also makes a difference. She notes that under the administration of a particular headmistress, teachers seemed to be more disciplined and prepared.

5.1.5.3 Students' Efforts in Learning

Maria, however, also recognizes the input that the student must put in the learning process and that responsibility for this process does not rest exclusively with the teacher.

It comes from both the student and the teacher because the teacher might not manage to cover the whole syllabus or s/he would not know how to teach. Then we cannot take down notes. However, it is our responsibility to study.

(Maria, first interview)

Maria's statement also sheds light on another issue which is inherent in the Maltese culture in that good teachers, are perceived as such, when they hand out ready made notes or dictate them during class. It is possible that teachers who do so give the impression that they are well-prepared and that they have gone the extra mile to prepare notes for their students. One needs to note that although in the short-term, examination notes might come in handy for the student, the opportunity for the latter to develop skills in note taking and independent learning are severely curtailed. Here we also find a

structure which strongly impedes the development of agentic behaviour from the student.

5.1.5.4 School Climates

Christine compares the teachers she had at secondary school to the ones at MCAST. She says that, at MCAST, teachers are not as accessible as the ones at secondary school with whom she felt more at ease. She claims that they are all right essentially but the way the buildings are physically structured hinders access to the teachers at MCAST. It seems that the ways in which schools are built may facilitate or hinder “student-teacher interaction”.

The environment between MCAST and secondary school is different. The teachers are really all right and some of them are really more all right than others. But the teachers at secondary knew us better and we were much closer to them than we are with the teachers at MCAST. They are well-meaning but we get to see them on fewer occasions. At school when we had a problem all we did was to travel within the same building block. Over here we have different blocks. During secondary school it's like you grow up with the same teachers around you.

(Christine, second interview)

Christine seems to point to the warmer climate (Rosenthal, 1973a; 1973b) that she was used to at secondary school. This is the climate that she misses and which seems to be buffered at MCAST because of the different building structures where students lack proximity to lecturers. However, the building structure was not the only issue for Maria as she states that she had a lot of hassle with an outgoing Director of one of the institutes at MCAST.

I had a lot of hassle and that was really unhelpful these past two years. The hassle was my hassle – general hassle. I have been here for three years and for those three years that I had been saying that the previous director should vanish. She had a terrible character and she used to do everything to dishearten me. And with me that is the worst thing you can do because I will immediately lose interest and fall behind. I was really happy when they told me that she retired. It was a big breath of very fresh

air. Her attitude was really bad and she never said "Hi" or smiled at us. All she did was frown and tell us off for one thing or another. She used to criticize us each day and that demoralized me.

(Maria, third interview)

Doanna shares the same feeling as Christine with regard to her lecturers at the Institute of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and also at the Institute of Community Services (ICS). It seems that this new arrangement did not appeal to her at ICT but then she managed to do so at ICS with the help of friends.

I found that the teachers at MCAST are not as protective as the ones at secondary school. They tell you that if you do not take your own notes then it's your own problem! The environment is different to the one at school. You have to find the will to go to your lessons. But now in hairdressing I feel OK.

(Doanna, second interview)

At ICT there was a teacher who was not interested in explaining to me or he used to rush too much for me to understand.

(Doanna, second interview)

The fact that I only got a good grade in my English as an 'O' level made me apply for the Foundation Course. It's not right that I did not do so well but I learnt much more through the Foundation year because I was really prepared for the course. I think that the teachers and the students at MCAST made all the difference for me because even the lessons are very interesting. For example I really liked Sociology lessons so in my exams I always got a mark in the nineties. I think I really found my place here.

(Melissa, second interview)

I am very happy with the course that I chose and I do not have anything to change. We had a teacher who was not doing his job well. We used to ask him and he used to answer 'Yes now I will get to that' but he never would!! We had reported him and the MCAST officials had spoken to him but it was useless so they sacked him and they got another teacher. Then it was OK and we started getting the hang of it.

(Ariana, second interview)

A part-time teacher also bothered me because I think he used to work in a factory and I don't think that he had the necessary qualifications to

teach. We asked him questions and he used to answer us about some other thing! And we used to really laugh at him so we started ignoring what he was saying. We went to his lesson to be marked present.
(Christine, second interview)

The participants were not happy with the kind of lecturing that they were being given and once again there is an incidence of agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that agency is a temporally embedded process of social engagement which is informed by past experience but also oriented toward the future and the present. In the excerpts above, Ariana and Christine state that they were not happy with the way they were being taught and they forecasted that with someone who was better prepared, they would do a better job in the subject. The process of teaching and learning is a process of social engagement and through the past experience of both Ariana and Christine in evaluating good and bad practice of teachers, they could then act upon their experience with teaching and learning at MCAST. In fact, both demonstrated agentic behaviour in different ways: Ariana reported the fact to authorities whilst Christine made the lecturer's job more difficult by adopting behaviour which was not really conducive to learning.

5.1.5.5 Educators in Students' Lives

Therefore both teachers and school management seem to have a great share of the influence over the learning environment and most particularly on the students who are able to compare and contrast the opportunities that different educators are giving them. It also seems that the type of building facilities could influence the proximity and type of relationship that students are able to foster with their teachers. Moreover, students are not passive recipients of the environment around them but they actively contribute, recognise the importance of their own effort and are able to indicate what works for them or otherwise.

5.1.6 Myself, My Family, My Friends

In the literature review, the importance of the family in the Maltese context was highlighted. The smallness of Malta makes it uncommon for Maltese students to find their own accommodation when they start attending College or University (although the reverse is true for their Gozitan Counterparts). The students talk about their relationships with their families referring to their continual battle of asserting their own individuality as adolescents.

In this section, I focus my attention on the participants' personal life experiences giving rise to the development of the sixth theme entitled "Myself, My Family, My Friends". The phrase portrays the development of the participant's self amongst significant others which is seen to gradually distantiate itself from the family of origin. Parents seem to have exercised vigilance with the participants when they were younger children and this seems to gradually diminish as the participants grow older. Creating one's own personal space is also a process of significant importance which accompanies the distantiation of the self. Within this theme, we also find that some participants and their parents underwent role reversal where responsibility for the general well-being of the family of origin was also adopted by some of the participants. The onus of the family support mechanisms was not always, as one would expect, exclusively shouldered by parents but was also taken on by some of participants such as described later on in this section with regards to Phoebe. This issue is not only seen with regard to family business concerns but also with regard to the personal problems faced by families such as in Christine's case who has to prioritise. It is evident that for Christine's family, studies were not given top-most priority whilst the pressure to perform and demands by the college had to still be met. Within this theme, another subtheme

emerged in that we see that Doanna created alternative support mechanisms through friendship when she found no form of constructive support within her family. Doanna also speaks about not having any reaction from her family in that it seems that she would like them to give her feedback. Such a pattern was directed both to personal life experiences and/or as a direct influence on the course of studies.

5.1.6.1 Parental Intervention

At times it seems that parents impose their wants and desires onto their sons and daughters. However, Ariana here points out that it is sometimes legitimate for them to do so as they are parents and this behaviour is associated to their role as such.

Sometimes I think that they pester me too much about studying but sometimes I say that they are right.

(Ariana, first interview)

Daniela is experiencing disagreement between her parents with regard to her own lifestyle in relation to her career choice. Although she goes to modelling and singing lessons she claims that both her parents want her to study. She claims that currently, although her exams are approaching, she is taking part in a modelling competition. Her mother encourages her but her father disagrees.

Even though I go to modelling and singing lessons, my parents want me to study. At the moment I am doing a modelling competition. My mother lets me but my dad does not really approve.

(Daniela, first interview)

Kirsty's parents also do not agree amongst themselves about where she should further her studies. However, both of them show her that ultimately the decision should be her own. Here it seems that her father thinks that Kirsty should take up hairdressing.

Interestingly, Kirsty never attended MCAST nor went to Junior College because she always attended the Higher Secondary.

My father encourages me to come to MCAST. He told me: "Isn't it better for you to take up a course over there?" Even my mother wants me to further my studies but my mother wants me to go to Junior College and my father wants me to go to MCAST. However, they always told me that the decision rests in my hands. My mother knows because she missed out a lot on school and does not wish me to suffer. She knows that school is important and my father reasons out this way because he has taken up a trade. He wants me to take up hairdressing but hairdressing is not my line. I am not patient. I like doing hair but I do not want it to be my daily bread and butter.

(Kirsty, first interview)

Both Kirsty's and Daniela's parents are in disagreement and they convey mixed messages to their daughters as to what they should do after they finish school. Both participants are able to capture this issue and find themselves in a "neither here nor there" situation. Moreover, although parental intervention seems to push towards encouraging the participants to further their studies, some parents do not then intrude on the type of career that the participants want to undertake as long as somehow they are studying. Ariana talks about this as follows:

My mum said that if I want computers I would take computers.

(Ariana, first interview)

The situation changes when they see that she has settled at MCAST:

My parents do not pester me any longer. I am now being a perfectionist because I am really happy at MCAST because I am the one who wants to go.

(Ariana, second interview)

In this subtheme we see evidence of vigilance which is described by Ball et al. (2000) in their analysis of Kristy. As described in section 2.0 of this thesis we see that in Malta, young people live with their parents until they get married. Like Kristy, Maltese parents support their children financially and so expect their children to abide by their own rules. In the case of Daniela and Kirsty, however, we see that parents are in disagreement as to what course of action each should take. Whether both dropped out of school as a result of this issue or whether this is a coincidence remains undetermined.

5.1.6.2 Creating Personal Space

Later on Ariana also declares that her parents are now treating her as an adult. Her mother has resumed working and therefore she has now got to make it on her own to college meaning that she has to wake up very early to be there at eight in the morning for the first lecture.

Things have changed considerably since I left school. At first my parents especially my mum used to give me lifts but now that she is working, this is no longer possible. Now I have to catch two buses to come to school on the main campus.

(Ariana, third interview)

Therefore vigilance and support by parents for some of the participants gradually decreases as they are given more space and also more responsibility.

On the other hand, although Christine appreciates her parents' support in her studies, she has mixed feelings about it when this occurs in her personal life. She feels that she needs more space to live her life yet she appreciates that her mother is a source of life experiences which she lacks. She also senses a difference between herself and her brothers because she claims that she discloses things to her more than

they do. However, she is careful to point out that this happens not because she is a female but because she talks more about her own issues than her brothers tend to do. Therefore this kind of relationship with her mother is expected by the family.

We are still very close but there are times when we still argue myself and my mum. Before we did not use to argue that much. The last time I was going out with someone for example, my mum did not really agree with me about this relationship. She used to tell me these things for my own benefit and then I still ended up the way she had told me about. That time when I was dating him we did not have such a good relationship in fact and we did not really speak because she really took it against me and she was right! Today I would say she was right but in those days I was too involved and I could not be objective. However even though he really hurt me she was there for me in the end and she really helped me and at the end of the day I thank God that I had her. It's always like this no matter what she tells me and how hard headed I am, I end up in the situation that she would have forewarned me about. It's not really annoying to be honest but this really surprises me because it baffles me in the sense that she would be reading into the future! My mother really knows me well! She would tell me for example "I imagine you going out with that guy!" Then my mind begins to think and it's true, I would imagine myself going out with him. She's like that! For example when I started dating this guy she immediately told me: "You're gonna get hurt!" When I used to date another guy she said "I have a feeling that you're gonna hurt him!" And that is what happened! And I don't know! I really don't know what powers that woman has!

(Christine, third interview)

I feel that I need a bit more space yes. I have nothing to grumble about in reality you know because when we talk it's OK because she leaves it to my hands but there will be moments when I am scared to tell her some things and then I lie to her out of necessity! I am still sorry then that I would have lied to her. But then if I wouldn't have lied I would not have done what I wanted.

(Christine, third interview)

My mum is close to me not because I am the girl but because I am the one who talks most at home. I have brothers not sisters....well they ask because I am femalewhere are you going and everything...the others ...well one is engaged so it's sort of obvious! The other one, when they ask he says "I don't know!" It's not that they don't worry about them you know because they do worry but because I am a female they are more careful about it. So perhaps without knowing I tend to talk a lot more than my brothers with her about where, when and with whom I spent my time."

(Christine, second interview)

Christine is trying to separate herself from her family but she finds this difficult. Her mother does not intrude in what she is covering at school but seems to influence her quite a lot when it comes to her personal life. Like Rena in Ball et al.'s (2000) research, Christine leads a double life. Separation from her mother and the struggle to construct a separate identity seem to be harder for Christine. Contrary to the other participants, Christine experiences stronger parental control on her life. Here it seems that she likes to open up with her mother but on the other hand she is not ready to receive any form of advice from her. These excerpts from the interview also seem to show that her mother is not ready to separate her own personal issues from her daughter's. She seems to live her daughter's life as though it were her own, giving her advice and also not giving her enough space to commit her own mistakes. Christine finds her own way of getting out of this situation by lying. She creates an acceptable world for her mother and a mechanism which would function for both. Christine is a social actress and her lying, a behaviour described as occurring in the present, is a result of the lack of space which is afforded to her by her mother and her orientations to experience the things that Christine wants in the immediate future.

In her final interview Maria shows evidence that the situation seems to have changed. She states that her parents give her more freedom and she states that she does not really miss her parents. This is seemingly an indication that Maria seems to want to move on and to separate herself from her nuclear family.

I have more freedom at home finally. They give me more chances than I had when I was younger. I can now experiment with things and learn out of my own mistakes much more than they allowed this before. But those who do not commit any mistakes cannot learn! One such example was when I escaped from home. My father was going to have a heart attack and there were the police at home. I was at Bugibba itself and I remember that I had gone back home because I missed my doggy!
(Maria, third interview)

For Maria we see that her parents' vigilance (Allatt, 1993 in Ball et al., 2000) gradually decreases as they see that she is increasingly more focused on her studies and settled down in a stable relationship with her boyfriend.

5.1.6.3 Giving and Receiving Support from the Family

In her second interview, Christine in fact confirms that her family is very happy that she is attending MCAST and that she receives a lot of support.

My family is very well thank you! They are very happy that I am at MCAST. They are supporting me a lot.

(Christine, second interview)

This situation barely changes throughout the entirety of this research except for a time period in which the family experiences sickness and death as portrayed in section 5.1.6.4. In her final interview, Christine declares that her family helps her a lot because they check on her and keep abreast on the state of affairs at College.

I think that my family helped me a lot because they always support me and encourage me to study. During exams when I would be studying they would come to see how I am in my room.

(Christine, second interview)

In Maria's case, her parents seem to be very supportive and in fact also promise rewards to their daughter. They are ready to pay for choir practice and to open up a nursery for her should she be successful in her studies. They are also supportive in finding work and in the actual studying process. However, one must point out that the actual support always seems to stem from her mother and that her father is very rarely mentioned. This is demonstrated along various instances throughout both interviews as follows:

If you pass your 'O' levels we will pay for choir and if you achieve your diploma in Early Years we will open your own nursery. They always encourage me.

(Maria, first interview)

My mother told me that as soon as I will finish my 'O' level exams, she will take me to ETC and they will find me a summer job so that I will know all about child care. My mother pushes me a lot.

(Maria, first interview)

My mother always studied with me.

(Maria, second interview)

Melissa also seems to be supported mostly by her mother. At first, this support is minimal and mainly verbal. Later on, her mother takes a personal interest in the course she is taking in care because her own mother (Melissa's grandmother) used to do the same work in the UK. Therefore the type of support that Melissa achieved went from a non-specific type to specific behaviour related to a kind of family legacy.

My mother is the one who supports me because she tells me to keep trying. If I do not manage she keeps telling me to try again.

(Melissa, first interview)

My mother is the one who supports me the most because the course interests her personally as my grandmother (her mother) used to do the same work in the UK. So my mother always reads my files. She also likes to know what is going on during placement. She likes the work but she cannot do it because my younger sister is still at school and so it's difficult. But if she had to work she would work like I am in care and she would do well. I tell her that there are mothers who are studying with me at MCAST but she thinks it's hard.

(Melissa, second interview)

Later on, Melissa declares a slight change in the support that she receives from her parents and her elder sister also enters her scenario. Her mother had to go back to the UK for some time because her maternal grandfather just passed away and her dad is mentioned for the first time as being supportive.

My mother still supports me a lot but right now, she isn't here but she's in the UK because my grandfather just passed away. She's staying there for the time being but she always encourages me and even my dad does so.
(Melissa, third interview)

On the other hand Phoebe is now supporting her family in their business in her free time. She claims that this is somewhat stressful to her and that she is cautious in how she relates to her new boyfriend. The bitter experience that she had, owing to an assault that she suffered, created a protective attitude towards her parents rather than seeking protection from them. She talks about her experiences as follows:

A month and a half ago I was attacked on my way home. I was tired and I decided to go home on foot rather than get the usual lift home with a friend. This guy jumped on me and stole my bag. A car passed by and they did not even stop to lend a helping hand. I am still going to the police and I have a lot of hassle about it. I have no problems in the mornings but in the evenings I never go anywhere on my own. I did not tell my parents until the Monday after because I did not want to worry them. I even ended up suffering from panic attacks. I do not own a car as yet and I always went everywhere on foot. At the Police Depot it was really hard because they wanted to create an identikit and that was really stressful. I do not want to go to counselling because I do not want to drag along with this story and it's all added stress for my parents. I am an only child and it's even worse for them. It's over now!

(Phoebe, third interview)

Phoebe feels obliged towards her parents because they already had a restaurant business before which they gave up when she was little in order for them to provide her with the care she needed. She states that now that she is older and more independent, her parents can find the time to take care of this kind of business which is very time consuming and intensive.

My mother works here (family restaurant) in the evenings because in the mornings she works at a supermarket. This restaurant was a big coincidence you know but we have it on lease for three years. My father was a salesman before. They used to have this (catering) kind of

business before but they had stopped everything when I was born because they could not manage. Now that I am older it's much easier for them because I am more independent.

(Phoebe, third interview)

Essentially here we see a certain degree of personal change in that we also see role reversal. Role reversal usually describes a situation where a child assumes parental responsibilities to an extent that this exceeds the developmental norms in a given culture. (Mayseless, Bartholomew, Henderson and Trinke, 2004). Phoebe still needed support and even more so owing to the attack that she suffered. She chooses to protect her parents rather than run to them for support and advice.

The issues which are tackled by Phoebe are also linked to the next subtheme. For Phoebe, her support towards her family is more important than anything else and even though she is tired owing to her full-time job, and has even experienced an assault, she sees herself protecting her family and gives this priority in life.

5.1.6.4 Giving Priority to Family Matters

Family matters for some of these participants always take precedence over school as is shown in Christine's experience with hospitalisation and even the death of a family relative. In her third interview she talks about this period in her life as follows:

This year was a difficult one because I had quite a lot of experiences which were really tough. At first I was dating someone and he left me. When I started school this year I was really bad. Then after a while, my brother was hospitalised with a slipped disc and then after a while my father was hospitalised too. My brother used to give us courage himself when he was in hospital. We were all down in the dumps and he was strong and happy. Now he is just fine! My father on the other hand is a sensitive person. The doctors said that he had an allergic reaction to dust. However, he always worked in dusty places. Every time we went to see him, he used to burst out crying. Then for example my father was

discharged on a Wednesday and then my grandfather was hospitalised on a Friday. Then my grandfather passed away! It was a frightening experience because to top it all when he passed away I was with him because we were taking turns! School for me at the time was non-existent and I did not have the brains for it anyways at the time! My friends told me that hadn't we known you, we would have thought that you were making all this up! I did not go to a counsellor you know because I wanted to manage my own problems. Today at present I still can't deal with the fact that my grandfather is not here anymore. I was very close to him as you know. It's also because I have two aunts who used to live with him and they used to take care of him. My father does not talk much about him as my father would not be the type of person to open up but the others were so bad! This was a very very hard experience for me. It was my cousins who helped me most during this period because I did not really want to bother my friends so much! It's OK to tell them what happened and that you feel sad about once or twice but then you aren't going to talk about it all the time. I do not want to burden my friends with my own sadness and problems. My cousins were going through the same experience so they could understand me better!"

(Christine, third interview)

For Christine, this experience was overwhelming as she experienced the loss of a significant other for the first time in her life. This diminished her motivation to study and she experienced an impasse as she focused her energy on the needs of her family.

5.1.6.4.1 What I do is not important to my family

Doanna seems to be cut off from the attention of her family because of the financial situation at home. She has not even told anyone at school that there is no money at home. Her father does not work and her mother neither. Her sister is physically and mentally disabled. These issues seem to impede the family from giving importance to the choices that Doanna now has to make. She feels that her family is absent when she would like them to give her feedback on her choices. They encourage her to study but they do not tell her whether her choice in taking up computing would be worthwhile. This is really different to what we would expect from the Maltese context in that owing to the opening of a considerable number of jobs in the IT sector, one would expect these

parents to push and encourage their daughter to take up studies in this area. Yet it seems that the situation of this family is one of disillusionment about the possibility of their daughter in actually succeeding to find a job and in her making a difference in life when compared to their own. Nevertheless it seems that Doanna would like her parents to become more involved in her choices but they seem unable to do so. Doanna's parents seem to demonstrate "learned helplessness" in that they prefer not to guide Doanna or to voice their opinion for fear that it would be futile. The energy that these parents have seems to be entirely spent on Doanna's sister and the difficult financial situation that they are experiencing.

I do not tell anyone about the financial situation. No-one knows and not even anyone at school knows about it. My parents do not work and my sister is bed ridden. They encourage me to study but they do not tell me whether they like what I chose.

(Doanna, first interview)

In her second interview, Doanna reiterates what she said about her family in that they do not give her their opinion.

I do not even open up with my family any more. I literally ignore what they say and I do not tell them anything. I have good friends at MCAST now and they know what it is like at home.

(Doanna, second interview)

The situation seems to be more or less the same at the time of the final interview with periods of turmoil and stability.

I am OK but at home we had a period of turmoil but now everything is all right and everything has settled back to normal. I always had clashes at home. My mother does not really understand me and we always argue and so on. My mother is like getting worse.....she spends a week OK and then she spends three bad days. My father is still very much the same!

(Doanna, third interview)

Doanna also experiences disengagement but she disengages from her family rather than from school and focuses her energy on what goes on at College.

Disengagement here refers to instances where there is emotional distance between family members (Chalquist, accessed on 24/07/11). In the next subtheme, we see how Doanna uses the social structure at MCAST to develop her own identity and to get the kind of support that she needs in order to be successful.

5.1.6.5 Support from Friends

On the other hand Doanna speaks about the support she receives from her friends. She talks about the support that they give each other during assessments and about how they are best friends.

My friends help me a lot because we really support each other. We tell each other: "You will pass for sure in this assessment. You will do a good job and will manage!"

(Doanna, first interview)

Doanna also refers to "the split" that she had with her best friend and what she has learnt out of this experience in life in general. She speaks about being uncomfortable in that kind of situation with her best friend and about the way in which she is coping in the new scenario. Here we find Doanna in transition. Her move away from her family is supported by the mother-child relationship she initially develops with her best friend. The latter emulates what Doanna used to experience with her mother as her best friend enacted an "us against them" experience by speaking against friends with Doanna. Doanna already has experience of this with her mother as the latter makes the situation weigh heavily because of lack of income and the other sibling who is severely disabled. Doanna pushes away from this situation of learned helplessness twice – the first time with her mother and the second time with her best friend.

To be honest I recently split up with the best friend I had. I feel I have changed because I do not need to be careful about what to say any more. I can say whatever I want to. She used to control what I said and she was very bossy. It has been two weeks now and I feel so much better! We used to be best friends you know and we are still in the same class. She used to talk to me as though I am her daughter! I used to tell her you know that she was annoying me but she always ignored my comments. She also used to tell tales behind my friends' backs. And then two weeks ago I felt I could not take it anymore and I just told her all I had to tell her. It can't be that each and every time we meet she starts talking badly about our friends. We now still stay with the same clique but we two do not speak to each other. However, even with this friend of mine, in a way even though the experience was a bad one, I thank God for it because I have learnt out of it! I have really learnt what she is made up of!

(Doanna, third interview)

Doanna also compares her experiences with friends at secondary school and at MCAST. Contrary to what she experienced during the hairdressing course, her classmates during secondary school did not offer the same support mechanism which she needed in order to move away from her family. She states that at secondary school, she could not express herself the way she wanted to and she felt "left out" and even ridiculed by her classmates. At MCAST she felt more accepted and supported and she speaks about it in the following way;

At the secondary school I did not get the opportunity to express myself the way I wanted to. Even my friends if I listened to some rock music they would snigger at me and say: "What are you listening to?" It was only when I finished secondary school that I managed to make friends with the same interests that I managed to express my feelings. My friends at secondary school did not allow this!

(Doanna, third interview)

5.1.6.6 Friends as Enemies

Christine's experience of friendship is interesting because in her eyes it seems that she always starts on the wrong track taking her a while to adjust and to make amends. In her transition we see that her choice of taking up geography at secondary

school to be with her friends was a big mistake. Moreover, she declares that during her first year at MCAST she wasted a lot of time during lessons.

I had chosen geography because of my friends and I do not like it and although some of them are going to Junior College I do not want to go there. So I want to think about what is best for me because that is what you have to do in this world. I made a mistake that once and I will not do it again. So if I am good to go to MCAST I will go to MCAST. I want to go there and that is where I will go.

(Christine, first interview)

Last year I was with my friend and we had made friends from MCAST. She is really my type and she is the funny type. We really used to laugh during lessons. I rarely used to do my homework. However this year we decided to stay apart. At first it was hard because we were really close but this year it's much better and she shares the same opinion. We are taking it more seriously and it's much much better.

(Christine, second interview)

The situation remains the same and she states that her friends from MCAST are always very supportive when it comes to balance things out between family demands and school.

My friends, those who come with me to MCAST, also support me and when something happens or I do not understand something from school, I always found my friends by my side at all times.

(Christine, third interview)

However her other friends always posed problems and it seems harder for Christine to maintain smooth relationships outside school. The relationship with this friend changed from them being almost like close sisters to barely looking at one another.

I changed my friends! It's not always the same story with friends. One of them for example was really close. She was the type who used to come to my house and my mother used to even prepare her lunch to take to school the following day. I used to date a guy and she used to date his cousin. I then decided to just remain friends with him and she just completely changed her attitude towards me. Her boyfriend says hi but she does not even speak to me. I can't understand why and when I asked her she says it because I don't feel as close as I used to that is why! I

don't know whether it's the real reason or because she says so to get rid of me. I had asked her about three times but then when I saw that she would not give me the real reason I decided to give up because I felt that it was useless for me to try. In my opinion, I never did anything to harm her. There is nothing I should feel bad about. It's up to her. But she is the one that really hit me hard when she decided to move away. I did not really worry about any other friends because I still say hi to all of them. I am not one of those who holds grudges. At first I would be very angry about the situation but then it's easy for me to forgive and forget.

(Christine, third interview)

Ariana also seems to attribute importance to the choices that her friends make. She looks up to those who are older than she is and the encouraging experience that they have had at MCAST. She also notes that most of her friends at school were considering MCAST as a choice. In her second interview she states that she was very happy in her class at MCAST.

There are a lot of my friends who are going to MCAST but not all of them. If I don't manage I will go to Higher Secondary to get more 'O' levels for me to eventually attend MCAST.

(Ariana, first interview)

I made a lot of friends at MCAST and we were like a big family in my class. We were only one class at the PTP (Private Training Partner) and we were really close and I was really happy there.

(Ariana, second interview)

Friends seem to be a great influential factor in the transitory experience of some of these students. There are participants who were not influenced at all and who took their own decisions whilst others were influenced to a greater or lesser extent. Influences impinged on the type of school, course chosen and the type of behaviour adopted in class. Melissa thinks that she was successful in her studies because of her friends and she firmly believes that having your own clique at school is of great help.

My friends really helped me throughout the course. Without their help, I do not think I would have done as well as I did. If you have your own clique who always help you, you always tend to do better.
(Melissa, second interview)

However, towards the latter part of the study, it seemed that for Melissa friends who are also her colleagues at MCAST not only supported her in her studies but also greatly influenced the decision she took to terminate her four-year long relationship with her boyfriend. She talks about it as follows:

I learnt out of the relationship and it hurt to have to stop it after four years. But now it's much better for me because I had a big burden on me. It had become a routine and he was becoming like a brother to me. Then I decided to do something about it and I did. I had a few quiet moments to myself and I decided to end it on that day. ... and finally I managed because these feelings had been going on for quite a long time. Even my friends used to ask me why I was delaying it and they used to tell me that it was unfair on him as well. But finally I managed ...I am still in contact with him and we're still friends and I try not to speak to him for a long time. I feel much better now that I managed because a lot of things had to come out and I did not know how to tell him. He had become my best friend but not my fiancé.

(Melissa, third interview)

On the other hand for Maria, her current long term relationship has become the most important focal point in her life. This is the same as Rachel's experience in the case study presented by Ball et al. (2000). All of Maria's decisions seem to centre on the present relationship with a hope for the future which will be expanded on subsequently in this chapter in section 5.1.8. In the initial part of the final interview she immediately revealed that she would be getting engaged later on during the year and about her plans for the future with her boyfriend.

I am going to get engaged in 9 months time. I have been with him for a year and three months.

(Maria, third interview)

The experience which has really boosted my life is the fact that I am getting engaged with the love of my life! We are really excited....we have to find a home for us.... a lot of plans....dreams actually! It is important for me to get married because for one thing it would mean that I could take it easier from working! I would probably opt to be a housewife if I could! Well I think I would! If we had a stable income and we would afford it then yes I would stay at home! I think I would still be bored at the end of the day! Well I have to have options and would not like to do anything because I really have to. I cannot be forced into anything because otherwise I would get mad!

(Maria, third interview)

However, on the contrary to Rachel's scenario, Maria's parents do not see her boyfriend as a distraction. However the ambitions of these young women are different as Rachel intended to read for a degree in medicine at Cambridge whilst Maria is only intent on completing her BTEC National Diploma.

5.1.6.7 Forming an Individual Mind

Findings seem to indicate that families in general are much more directive towards the end of compulsory schooling and that this direction seems to ease off the older the students get. Ball et al (2000:44) assert that families and parents differ. Typically middle class parents have clear aspirations for their children, are pro-active and "interventionary" in choice-making at 16 or beyond. Others, typically the working class, pass on decision making to their child while expressing their concerns or unquestionably backing the choices made by their sons or daughters. Most parents in research conducted by Ball et. al (1999) and Macrae and Maguire (1999) in Ball et al. (2000) had a clear view of unacceptable decisions and of what was best for their child. Advice seeking and referring to parents seems to become much more of a choice than an obligation the older the student gets. The family on the other hand still monitors personal relationships which these young people engage in. Friends and family continue

to be significant others in the formation of the individual participants' identities. There is a continuous struggle within this transitive experience in order to establish a secure set of identities. The use of the plural here is in agreement with what is purported by Ball et al. (2000) in that young people construe different identities for different purposes. Furthermore identities are always incomplete in process (Grossberg, 1996 in Ball et al., 2000). This occurs at any point in time throughout the lifespan and in particular settings *“there is a limited set of possible identities to be expressed, instabilities to be managed or resolved, social relations to be coped with or avoided, ‘people like me’ to be sought out.”* (Ball et al. 2000: 35)

5.1.7 (L)Earning a Living

Participants also spoke about their experiences at work and how this helped them to find their own pathway for this transition. This data gave rise to the development of a further theme which I entitle (L) Earning a Living. Within the data, the role of work as source of learning and as a means to earn a living emerged. The link between what is learnt at college and whether this is supported or otherwise at work was explored; and this was further evidenced by the need of having work placements which supported what was being learnt at college. The need to apply what was learnt was highly emphasised by Ariana who was not given the opportunity to go on work placements as part of her course programme. Family businesses offered work opportunities for some of the participants and the need for being able to separate oneself from the family for work was highlighted by at least two of them namely, Christine and Phoebe. One must point out that Daniela prefers otherwise. Learning about work and different employment conditions as well as the impact on quality of life and well-being was another area which was analysed in this section as experienced by both Daniela and Phoebe. Moreover, the role of placements in orienting the participants towards a particular career path was the

subject of another subtheme because as intended by the college systems, placements served their purpose and acted as tasters in the world of work for these participants in helping them to undertake more informed choices. In fact, both Melissa gave up on taking child care as an option owing to the fact that their job expectations were different and because possibilities to find work are limited. For most, part-time work was seen as a distraction to full-time studies and work was also seen as a source of physical hardship which oriented some of the participants to further their studies in order to better their jobs or to delay entry into the world of work. Finally, as in the case of Doanna, finding a work opportunity on the other side of the island was also seen as an opportunity to make a fresh start distant from the area in which her family lived.

The title which I chose for this theme enables the reader to see work as a place for learning about work and about life in general. Participants learnt that the world of work has a direct impact on their life at present and also in the future. At work, they do not only earn financial rewards but they earn knowledge. This, in turn, gives them the possibility of making adjustments to their pathways in order to enhance their possibilities in life.

5.1.7.1 Students' Ways of Linking Classroom-based Learning to Work Practices

The link between what is taught and expected at College and what is perhaps informally taught and expected on the workplace has been remarked upon by Ariana. Although she is reading for a diploma in ICT she could see the importance of discipline and rules at college, because she found a similar attitude at work even though she worked as a pool attendant. What Ariana seems to be experiencing here is a transfer of learning from one community of practice to another. At college she was bound by rules and regulations which were necessary for a conducive learning environment; whereas at

work as a pool attendant, the same rules were applicable for maintaining a safe environment.

This summer I worked full-time. I realized how well they trained us at the college because I could not take my mobile phone with me and I could not even dye my hair!

(Ariana, third interview)

Later on, Ariana finds part-time employment at a Marks and Spencer store in Malta. She asserts that her experiences at the Splash and Fun Park and as a salesgirl would not help her in her future employment as a programmer because she thinks that they are totally unrelated. She also compares the possibilities that programming offers her when compared to these short-term jobs that she had as she declares that as a programmer she can work from her own home.

Last Christmas I was a sales assistant at Marks and Spencer. You have to be smart in this job and you have to make sure that you do your utmost for the clients. I was at the restaurant so I did everything from cleaning to working in the kitchen even though I was told that I would work as a cashier. Currently I am not working but now I applied for the part 3B with the ETC (Employment and Training Corporation) and MITA (Malta Information Technology Agency) which is in line with what I am studying. I do not think that my experiences at Marks and Spencer and Splash and Fun will help me in my career as a programmer. What is good about programming is that you can work from home.

(Ariana, third interview)

5.1.7.2 College-Provided Work Placement Experiences

Ariana also comments that although she has been studying IT for three years, she has never worked in the field. She declares that she would have liked a work placement organized by MCAST in the field. She is aware that other students particularly the ones attending the Institute of Community Services have all had placements in the

field and she feels that she should have had the same opportunity rather than having to find her own work opportunities which had nothing to do with her studies.

MCAST could have provided a work-placement in IT.
(Ariana, third interview)

Christine prioritizes the work attached to her placement rather than the work she found on her own steam. She points out that she could not do both jobs because of the long hours and so she decided to focus on her employment as an accounts clerk, as provided by MCAST in relation to her studies.

I was going to work as an animator but I hurt my leg and had 12 stitches made. I decided to stop because I did not really get along with the others and it was too tiring as I finished at around half four in the afternoon from my work as accounts clerk at the Radisson and then off to rehearsals until three in the morning....and then I had to be up at seven in the morning for work again at the Radisson.

(Christine, third interview)

Hallam (2010) mentions that the inability to develop metacognitive and self-regulatory skills can limit the level of expertise attained. This is not evidenced in the case of Christine who remains focused and chooses her work placement provided by MCAST in relation to her course of studies at MCAST.

5.1.7.3 Working in the Family Business

Furthermore, Christine makes choices during this period and maintains that she would not like to work for the family because of her career progression and because she did not like the ways in which they treated other members of the family. She insists on keeping work and family as separate spheres in her life:

I do not wish to remain working in the family business.
(Christine, second interview)

The bitter experience of her mother who got hurt whilst working in the family shop has greatly influenced Christine who insists that she will not in any way be associated to the family with regards to work. We see that Christine adopts a “reflexive project of herself” (Colley et al., 2003) but this project is tightly bound in relation to her own habitus and in accordance to the self that she wants to become. The habitus is shaped by the experience that she herself has witnessed in the family business and is further endorsed by her mother’s outlook on what working in the family business involves. It is also shaped by her formation as an accounting technician at school and at her work placement. Christine chooses to focus her energies on her course at MCAST and on her practice as an accounts clerk and pushes away other opportunities to work for the family business.

For Daniela the situation is different as her parents have entrusted her with one particular shop which is one out of a number that the family owns. Daniela is very happy to be doing this and makes plans for the future in that she would like to be the sole distributor in Malta for a particular designer.

I would now like to concentrate on this clothes shop. I sometimes go to help in the hairdressing shop where I used to work if they are stuck but I would like to focus on this shop now as I want to be able to handle this business. Right now it's a bad time for business and it's very slow. Clients come to tell you that they have found the same item elsewhere and that it is cheaper. But you have to be patient and you try to please them. If I manage to get my own shop I would like to be the sole distributor for a particular make. When you have your own label, clients do not tend to ask you for a reduction in price.

(Daniela, third interview)

Phoebe makes comparisons between her full-time job and helping out in the family business. She states that she has to set an example to her Dad’s employees but

she feels a great decline in pressure when compared to her full-time job and yet also experiences a surge of responsibility in setting a good example.

With my dad I am really relaxed. Its not that I am really relaxed but if I want to drink I can and I can also answer my mobile. I cannot really do what I want still and there are limits because I would be setting a bad example to the rest of the staff and that's not right. It's tough to get up on Sunday morning when I am late on Saturdays.

(Phoebe, third interview)

In summer between the first diploma and the national diploma I was working with my father on sales. He owns a business where they install car stereos and I was going stock-taking because he had just changed the system. He had another shop before and it was small so he moved into a larger one so he had to change the systems. I did well with my Dad. I also dealt with clients but they are different clients to the clients in care. They all come in with their car! I like working in care more than the experience I had with my Dad in his business. I went to help Dad because I needed a summer job.

(Melissa, third interview)

Working within the family business might offer respite but is not necessarily the best solution for most of the participants even though the opportunity may be readily available to them. It seems that the participants would like to keep work separate from the family thus affirming their individuality.

5.1.7.4 Learning about Different Types of Jobs by Working

Daniela's experience is one of enjoying her learning whilst at work. School is not really relevant to her at this point in time and she feels that she does not really think it would offer her anything about what she would want to learn. The workplace for Daniela becomes her school. On the other hand, Phoebe changes jobs and finds herself in a more obscure position in relation to some work aspects. Although the possibilities of both Phoebe and Daniela are, at face-value, very similar, as individuals they perceive them as different. Phoebe changes job for better working conditions and for a higher

position but she finds herself being less trusted and having to learn different systems and procedures.

5.1.7.4.1 Enjoying Work

Daniela now finds that she is satisfied with her job and has no intention of giving it up to further her studies. Work has become her means of identification and her life revolves around it, and around her part-time job in modelling. Daniela also compares her present job to the previous one, which she had as a hairdressing assistant. She subtly indicates that it would be worth training, as a hairdresser only if you afford to run your own business. In her transition to full-time employment, Daniela has experienced exclusion from school as well as exclusion from the hairdressing profession, both being social groupings. On analysis the text seems to indicate that her happiness at the mobile shop reflects her previous experience in being excluded but this cannot be concluded. As a hairdressing assistant, she felt that she was underpaid for the hard work she did and she reflected that investing in studying for such a career is not a worthwhile choice unless one is self-employed. She seems to have formed her own community of practice in the mobile phone store and she is training a part-timer where their role is to tackle problems arising from malfunctioning phones and guarantees. Furthermore, Daniela seems to be in the “coalescing stage” (Wenger, 1998: 3) of the modelling community of practice. She is just getting to know that she can get paid for some of the work she previously used to do as a hobby and this includes her within the community.

I am a salesgirl in a mobile phone shop. I don't even think I would budge from there because I am very happy. I feel very much at ease with them. The shop is not big but I am a full-timer and there is a part-timer whom I am training. There are three shops in all in this business.

(Daniela, second interview)

Today because I have experienced it I think that being a hairdresser would be nice when you run your own salon and not when you work for

someone else. Where I work now in the mobile shop, is not worth to have your own business because there are days when you do not even make a sale. But when you are a hairdresser you would have appointments that would not be cancelled and you could never close down. But it's nice to have your own salon even with your own clients and the way the clients treat you. When you are a hairdresser you reap what you sow.

(Daniela, second interview)

I am not really interested to go to school but if I had to go to school I do not even know what I would choose. I had some experience and being a hairdresser entails a lot of work and a lot of effort because I really used to get tired and I didn't earn that much...and where I am now...I only wish I could go on because I am really happy. I have a good pay and I am saving up...I think that working on mobile phones is interesting. I meet a lot of people and I learn a lot about my work. I am very happy where I am.

(Daniela, second interview)

I still go to modelling ...there were many times when I said I would stop but I kept it up and now apart from it being a hobby it is also a part-time employment because I am getting paid for it. I saw myself growing up in it because I felt that I made progress. Anything I do now, I get paid for being on adverts or anything. So I think I will keep this as a side line.

(Daniela, second interview)

In her final interview Daniela reminisces about the time she spent working in the mobile shop but also compares responsibilities. She also talks about how good it felt to be doing what in her eyes is a man's job.

In the job I had at the mobile phone store, the owner actually had three shops. He trusted me with passwords, cheques, alarms, mending and servicing of mobiles when at the age of 15 I knew nothing about them! I always had it in me to pursue a career in retail because I like it. A mobile shop is a very big responsibility and I used to treat it as though it were my own business. I used to worry as to whether I had ordered all the parts, and that I had locked the shops, whether I had explained everything to the client. I used to worry so much about it at home. It's so much more problematic than a clothes shop! However, I used to like work at the mobile shop because it was not a traditionally female job. I used to have screw drivers to work with and I liked that job a lot!

(Daniela, third interview)

Daniela talks about the modelling experience that she had. She feels that she has achieved quite a lot for being a Maltese model and knows that she can do more but

she is unwilling to do so. This also seems to stem from the fact that Daniela likes to focus on one thing at a time and she seems to find it hard to cope with more. She has also stated that she would like to focus on her business so that might have pushed her away from pursuing more modelling opportunities.

I stopped a little bit from modelling but I have done a lot and I am actually proud of what I have done. I have done work for the Malta Independent. I actually got paid for the modelling I have done and for Malta it's quite an achievement. I like adverts and shoots but not competitions. They also told me to send profiles and photo shoots aboard but I have not done anything else because I get discouraged. I always procrastinate and then I lose opportunities. I also got chosen for Ms. Italia nel Mondo but then I think its waste of time. The organiser said it's a shame because I would have placed second for sure and I would have gone abroad. There would be a lot of commitments and activities. I do not like to be committed for a long period of time.

(Daniela, third interview)

However although she seems to be very much focused there is still one job opportunity which Daniela would like to try. She maintains that each time opportunities to work as a cabin crew with the Emirates Airlines were advertised, she was always in a relationship so she could not apply. She states that she has a lot of friends who do this job since it has very good working conditions and they are very happy.

I would like to work as a stewardess with Emirates and I always wanted to apply but when the applications were out I was always dating so this created problems. I have friends working there and they have very good working conditions and they are very happy.

(Daniela, third interview)

Daniela constructs a learning biography through her work experiences. She expresses interest in learning in a non-conventional way through non formal learning. Through various communities of practice she formed or still forms part of, she constructed her own tailor-made pathway with several risks. Beck (1992) outlines the

nature of a risk society where the individual, in this case Daniela, conceives of herself as a centre of action and plans her own learning biography. Nevertheless such a risk is minimised by means of her family's business to which she can always return to.

5.1.7.4.2 Changing Jobs

Phoebe talks about the change in job as being a major change in life. This change was brought about by the way she was leading her life as she was almost being cut off from her social circle.

When I left Things it's like I started a new life. It had been a long time that I was really unhappy at Things but I did not have the guts to leave so I kept putting it off. I had sent my cv about a year before. Then the manageress from Jennyfer's phoned me and they had come to see me at Things....they wanted to see my level of customer service. Customer Service to them is really important. I had a lot of problems to leave because I had a permanent contract which was renewable on a yearly basis. When I left I had to give them back six months of pay which they overrated because they calculated Sundays and overtime. They were really cheeky because they took an average of the previous year's earnings. Ms. L. the new manageress told me to work a further week and that Jennyfer's would pay a week themselves. But they made me stay there a further two weeks and they reduced the penalty by 3000 Euros. I did not leave on a very bad note though because most of the staff were my friends and I still spend time with them during my break. I had seen a lot of staff turnover in two and a half years and only three of us remained throughout.

(Phoebe, third interview)

Phoebe remains attached and loyal to her first employer and it seems that she did not expect them to react in the way they did with regard to her contract. Changing jobs for Phoebe resulted in a lot of stress and turmoil and she lost a certain degree of respect which she had earned at Things. Furthermore, we see that Phoebe is exhausted by the transition between jobs. Honouring her previous contractual agreement was not entirely paid off by her work experience with the new employer. Furthermore, different communities of practice warrant a degree of personal change. At Jennyfer's, Phoebe

had to make considerable adjustments and what she hoped for in a change for the better due to better working conditions ultimately resulted in her being awarded less trust and stricter rules during working hours.

5.1.7.5 Using Work as a Personal Learning Space

Initially Phoebe looks at work and study as separate entities, but then once she gains enough experience at work, she realizes that she can do both at the same time. The values and the feelings that she cultivates in her vocational habitus encompass a process of learning to become an expert in the field of merchandising and fashion wear displays. As a trainee store manager, Phoebe will also be managing a community of practice and is responsible for maintaining it at an “active” level (Wenger, 1998:3) by monitoring staff engagement, adapting to changing customer needs, renewing staff interest and commitment and building and maintaining relationships.

I talked to the manager before I accepted the job and I asked her if the company encouraged the employees to further their studies so that I would be able to arrange shifts. They really encouraged me and so did my family. I would like to be able to go to England because I have family over there. The shops are amazing over there. I had been to Topshop and I was staring at each and every item over the five storeys that we visited. I did not only look at the times but also the ways in which they were displayed. I would like to go to England with the same company I work with and I already spoke to them. At the moment they are unsure and they have to discuss this but she told me that if I study I can only go up and not down the career ladder. After a year after all I am already managing a shop.

(Phoebe, second interview)

Eventually, as mentioned later on in this chapter, Phoebe did try to have this experience but decided against it because of her closeness to her family and also because of the hefty financial investment that she would have to make. She also decides

to change jobs and to move on to a different clothing company. She maintains that she changed jobs owing to the working hours at Things and also because at Jennyfer's, which is the new job, she is now a manageress in a larger outlet. She talks about both experiences as follows:

I do not work at Things anymore but I work at Jennyfer's Boutique in Sliema. I have a better wage, the people I work with are better and I have a better position and better working conditions. I am an outlet manageress now. I am still training but I have been there only 6 months. I would have liked to stay at Things and they wanted me as a manageress but it was getting too much and the hours were too long and we worked till 11pm. Summer was no summer to me over there so it was not really worth it!

(Phoebe, third interview)

Phoebe talks about the different work practice and clientele that there is in her new job and she sees this as a new opportunity for learning. Phoebe experienced different communities of practice with their own work ethics, boundaries and ways of doing things. This opportunity to her is a learning opportunity and a means for her to find her way in life.

There is a lot of difference between we did stuff at Things. It helped me a lot to know a little bit about clothes because I like them a lot. The way we keep the cash and we greet the customers is completely different. Their system is completely different in different companies. Jennyfer's belongs to a chain of stores but it does not belong to Mizzi, it belongs to the same agency like Promod and so on.

(Phoebe, third interview)

The clients I get now are different because at Sliema they speak only English and here at Bugibba and San Julians they were not as posh. With Things I spent a year at Bugibba, 6 months at Sliema and a year at St. Julians. I spent a lot of time there and it was tough for me to leave but I could not miss this opportunity. I really cried when I had to tell the manageress and they did not want me to leave. I did not want to be greedy with the rest of the staff and not work in the weekends when they had to do them anyway so I decided to leave. Now I do not work Sundays and I work the same hours as the staff and if I want I can work with my dad in his restaurant and help out.

(Phoebe, third interview)

I owe a lot to Things because all I know I learnt from there. All I know about merchandising is from there and it was my very first job. At Jennyfer's you have to be careful about saying that red and blue go together because you have to be careful about shades. You have to be careful about what items to match with what. Right now flowers are very fashionable at the moment but putting them in a window is a hard thing. Our company is French and we receive very strict orders on how we have to display our clothes. I am responsible for windows and for VM (visual merchandising) which is how clothes need to be displayed within the shop. The very first time I went up to my manageress and told her OK I will put this with that in a very light way. We cannot do that because our windows tell a story...for example a biker ballerina. Clothes with a balletic theme yet with a lot of leather. Every section in the shop requires particular attention. The shop has thirty sections but right now we have ten sections because we can change the numbers of panels and we have a lot of stock. At Things it was much simpler, we did it once or twice and we got used to it. It was always the same: necklaces, bracelets, earrings, bags and hats. So at Jennyfer's I thought that a green top would go with a white skirt but it's not like that at all. I end up doing the displays a lot and I got used to it and it has to be within you. We are four working in the shop but I do this work. Whether I like the clothes or not is another issue and whether it suits the customer or not is yet another issue. I had a customer who was larger than I was and she wanted to take shorts which were size ten and not even I am a size ten, but she still wanted to take it and she could not even fasten it. I told her to take it a size larger but she said she wanted it for after she dieted. If it were for me she wouldn't have taken it. There are people who would say: What kind of salesgirls are there at Jennyfer's? So this is a lose-lose situation!

(Phoebe, third interview)

At Jennyfer's they asked management at Things about me as a worker. They wanted a reference from there. I still keep in touch with Things because my best friend still works there. Sometimes when they don't get the manager they still phone me to ask. It was hard to unlearn what I learnt at Things and I was used to working on my own with a minimal amount of supervision because I was really trusted. At Jennyfer's I have a senior but we are three so we must see that the work is evenly spread. At Things I used to be entirely on my own and how many times would I arrange and re-arrange the shop. If it's raining cats and dogs outside no-one would come shopping. Here there was another problem I always had the same route on the streets. People watch out for you and it was scary.

(Phoebe, third interview)

Phoebe speaks about herself as a reference point for those who work at Things.

Through this she manages to maintain a certain degree of respect. It seems that Phoebe

is entrapped between what was good for her at Things and what she later experiences at Jennyfer's. Jennyfer's for her is undoubtedly more professional in approach but she feels less trusted and respected then when she was at Things. Her earnings and working conditions at Jennyfer's have improved, but she realises that there are not the only important facets in a job.

5.1.7.6 Work as a Medium for Learning About Life

Jennyfer's still poses problems to Phoebe because of the working hours. It seems that although she is learning more about merchandising, there is a high price to pay owing to the amount of discipline that there is on the job. She is aware that eventually she would have problems maintaining her job if she decides to have her own family as she is already finding it tough to find time to spend with her boyfriend.

I do not know how long I will stay in this job. We'll see. There are days when I am really fed up. It's the hours that bother me. When you are dating someone it's really hard. To top it all my boyfriend works on a day, night, rest, off basis and it's tough to know that he's out and about and I am at work! However, right now I am coping. Its not that I don't trust him you know! Even when I used to go out with my friends, they used to phone me from a party and I had to work till 11pm. That really used to hit me. I end up working all week from Monday to Sunday and I really need some time to myself. But I feel guilty knowing that they are working here on a Sunday and that I am enjoying myself. They would not want me to work every Sunday but I do not think its fair anyway.

(Phoebe, third interview)

The working hours are still a big problem at Jennyfer's however! We cannot use mobiles at work and she asked me to stay on for another hour. I had to tell her to phone my boyfriend to pick me up an hour later

(Phoebe, third interview)

I will not even try to compare the level of discipline at Jennyfer's and at Things. At Things I used to be able to use my mobile and to phone but now it's impossible because they are really rigid. It's not that we are not trusted here you know but Jennyfer's are so much more professional.

(Phoebe, third Interview)

Phoebe compares the working conditions at Things and at Jennyfer's. She is aware that the working conditions at Jennyfer's are slightly better but she then hints at the fact that she was given quite a lot of responsibility at Things and that she was trusted. She talks about different communities of practice at the different outlets even though both belong to chain stores with a set practice. She is very happy that she has continued to improve on her expertise with regard to merchandising. She is able to talk about both businesses and to describe what they are about, how they function and the capabilities that each produce.

5.1.7.7 The Influence of College Work Placements on Subsequent Course Choice

Similarly, it seems Maria and Melissa based most of their decisions about their careers on their work experiences on placement. Although both of them strongly intended initially to take up child care as a career they then changed their opinions. In reality, Maria is now following the National Diploma in Health Studies whilst Melissa is reading for National Diploma in Health and Social Care. Melissa gave up child care as an option because as a result of her work placement, she found out that there is a lack of job opportunities. Although it seems that Maria was disappointed about her experience in child care, she seems to have learnt that a job in child care would not have been be a wise choice for her.

I chose the foundation course in care. I am now following the First Diploma in Health and Social Care with the aim of pursuing the course in early years. But now I think that I will go for the National in Care because there are more work opportunities. I had a placement at a home for children and I did not enjoy it because there was no discipline with the children and we could not do anything. You cannot correct their behaviour and you cannot scold them.

(Maria, second interview)

Later Maria decides to enrol for the National Diploma in Health Studies claiming that she did so because her grades were not good enough. However she also chose the course because she decided through her work placement that a career as a carer for the elderly or as a child carer.

Yes before I used to talk about working with children and in fact I still do because I work as a baby sitter on a part-time basis. I do this very often. However, I chose the National Diploma in Health Studies because there are a lot of different openings but the one I liked most is the possibility of becoming a Health Inspector and I think I am going to change career orientation completely.

(Maria, third interview)

I had two placements till now on this course. I liked health inspection mostly. Then I also went to Karen Grech Hospital for the Elderly but I used to keep a count down so that I would get out! The work placements taught me a lot of stuff and in fact I decided to choose Health Studies because I did not want to work in Care definitely not! In fact I worked as a reliever at Mater Dei Hospital and I did not spend more than two weeks over there! I left as fast as my legs could carry me! As placements, I have been to Day Centre, Dar tal-Providenza, Fra Diegu, Mosta Home, Environmental Health and Karen Grech Hospital. They are very different experiences: However between Mosta Home and Karen Grech there is basically no difference! We are treated as care workers because they even asked me "Why didn't you stop at First Diploma and come to work as a Care Worker?" I felt really degraded and my esteem was really low at that point! Because there is a difference between qualifying as a care worker, and then doing health studies. Health Studies is more difficult and then the placement should be different! Because then it's true otherwise I should have stopped at first diploma if the work opportunity is the same!

(Maria, second interview)

At Environmental Health I did everything. I went round I did vials and colour tests. Everything I did! You name it and I did it! A colour test for example...someone files a complaint that there is a drainage leak. You throw in a colour in the pipe and if the colour seeps through the pipe and ends up on the pavement, then it's true and there is a leak. If it doesn't then there is no leak!

(Maria, third interview)

I do nothing special apart from being a baby-sitter but I work as a salesgirl in a shop. It's a part-time job and nothing else and I would not want to do it forever. It is a handbag shop of the brand name "Segue" with quite a posh clientele particularly the Italian people. I work at Bugibba itself only a stone's throw away from home. I only leave five minutes before I start! I

am never alone in the shop but with my manager and she does not trust me on my own as yet. As a salesgirl you have to be very patient. Very patient! It is a nice job and I do well in it! I feel happy when I do something. I feel satisfied when I manage to sell something!

(Maria, third interview)

Maria also talks about her two part-time jobs. One is that of a baby-sitter and the other is being a salesgirl in a shop which sells bags. She claims that she is happy doing both jobs but on the other hand she wants to work full-time in environmental health and to work as a make-up artist in the evenings.

I might work full-time in environmental health and then part-time as a make-up artist but I might not! I don't know! I am opening as many pathways as possible so that I will have more choices in the future.

(Maria, third interview)

Maria wants to keep her career options open and refuses to be tied down to a single pathway. The only permanent commitment she has is with her boyfriend. Maria is not afraid of an unpredictable life course. She individually makes her own plans and negotiates her possibilities on an individual level. This is in line to what Furlong and Cartmel (1997) state in that the social world has only come to be regarded as unpredictable and full of risks that can only be negotiated on an individual level whilst structural forces operate as powerfully as ever. In reality, for Maria, opportunities will be limited or created by institutions and by the eventual possibility of her becoming a mother as she primarily wishes.

On the other hand, Melissa seems to have been positively influenced by her experience in two different care sectors one with children with a disability and the other in a private residential home for the elderly.

I had a placement with children because I was at a special school. I really enjoyed it there and felt really at ease even with the staff and the class. Yes over there I felt I belonged and I even told my care teacher that I wanted to stay there. At the school there were children with disability and I learnt how to talk to them and how we should behave. There were some of them who did not even speak. The staff guided me very well even in the Christmas activity I created. I made Father Christmas using paper plates. There were children who found it difficult but their faces showed that they were enjoying it and I was really happy and satisfied. The staff really took care of me and the class teacher used to help me and to show me what activities I should do. She used to tell me "Do this one for example because I am sure that the children would enjoy it." I was going to do the Christmas Activity in a different way but then she guided me in the appropriate direction. There was an assistant who was still in her twenties and we really got along. I really enjoyed it there.

(Melissa, second interview)

At the moment I am at Casa Resena. Even Mr. G's staff are really all right and I really got along with them. He always tells me to spread the word with my friends so that we could go work part-time and even in summer. I don't really know as yet but I think that I will go to work there. He writes a lot of feedback and he gives us advice. He tells us for example 'Speak to Mary (elderly client in a home) a while longer because she would not like it if we just did our job and left'. He is very dedicated and he gives us advice on the kinds of activities that we should organize. One time he even showed us how to organize story time with the clients and he is able to organize activities on the spur of the moment. He was asking the clients to tell us about their childhood. He is really helpful.

(Melissa, second interview)

Melissa's experiences on work placement are positive ones. She has been exposed to a variety of settings and has experienced what Fuller and Unwin (2003) define as expansive experience since she also has the possibility to attend a formal learning environment, namely MCAST. As an apprentice in both settings she is a legitimate peripheral participant (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Wenger's (1998) trajectories find little applicability to Melissa's scenario because of the nature of work placements. Since she was at both settings for only a few weeks, her trajectory could be labelled as "peripheral". This is because by necessity the placement is terminated by MCAST so that students all return to a full lecturing timetable. However, I believe that from Melissa's point of view, her intention is to become a full participant so in such a case both work

experiences could be “inbound trajectories” as newcomers join the community with the prospect of becoming full participants. In fact she was even offered a job at the home for the elderly.

Melissa thinks that work placements are an important course component but she is not very happy with the way that these were set up. She possibly thinks that a block placement would further define the stages of development of a community of practice as it seems that the placement never really starts up and never really terminates.

I am very happy on the course but if I had to change something I would change how the placements are set up. I think that they are really dragging when we go once-a-week. I prefer to spend a month there and then to stop the placement. When it goes on once a week for the whole year it really drags.

(Melissa, second interview)

In fact during her National Diploma, Melissa was happy with her experience on placement which lasted four consecutive weeks. She talks about the learning experience that she had on this placement and on the change in herself that she experienced. She also comments that she would have appreciated more support in the initial part of this placement where although this goes unmentioned, it seems that she had to undergo considerable adjustment.

I was in Valletta for the placement with the homeless and with those who suffered domestic violence. I really learned a lot because I had no idea about the kinds of problems they had – I did not even know they existed and I would say they have been through all this and how can I even think that I can help! I learned a lot even about myself for example what to do to help them and what kind of activities to do with them. I did a lot of activities. I liked it there and I really liked this placement. These people whom I thought would be tough and aggressive turned out to be really nice. So this experience really changed my mind about these people and I feel that I did well in this placement. I learned a lot even about my own

strengths and weaknesses and even just being OK with them will help them.

(Melissa, third interview)

MCAST could have done better in sending a tutor as early as possible on placements. The person who came to see us did not come in the first weeks but towards the end when I needed the most support in the beginning of my placement.

(Melissa, third interview)

Christine seems to have endorsed her choice in taking up the Accounting Technician Course as she has enjoyed and done well at her work placement. She feels a sense of achievement for the fact that they offered her to stay on.

I had a work placement at Radisson Golden Sands Hotel in the Accounts Department. I am now going every Monday after school. I really wish to keep my employment over there because they either tell you to quit after a month or they tell you to stay on and they asked me to stay!

(Christine, third interview)

Christine in fact stayed on but is aware that the timing for a job opportunity at the Hotel is not right. She also had another part-time working experience which she really enjoyed.

I still work at the Radisson Hotel on a part-time basis. MCAST sent me on work placement to Radisson once again last March and they have kept me on a part-time basis once a week. It might be a problem for the full-time job though. I don't think they will offer me a full-time job just yet. It will be very difficult for the time being. But in the future if they will need they already told me that I would get the opportunity but for the time being it's going to be difficult.

(Christine, third interview)

Last summer (2009), I had also worked as a waitress at the Villa Arrigo Reception Venue. I worked with Osbourne Caterers because they own the venue. It was a good experience. I really enjoyed it and the staff used to really make me laugh but then I stopped. Even the fact that I didn't go out because I had work did not bother me at all. There were friends of mine as well who worked there and it was like going out because we still had a good time.

(Christine, third interview)

For Christine having her employer confirm her work placement is a boost to her identity. Melissa, on the other hand, is able to give feedback and to contribute to the ways placements may be improved for the students' benefits. Her contribution is not only limited to her own learning but she is also able to feedback on ways in which MCAST may improve. This is what Spiteri and De Giovanni (2009) term to be "influential navigation" where students are not only passive recipients or beneficiaries of the MCAST system but also contribute to its improvement in the light of showing good practice on placement and in turn create demand for MCAST graduates.

5.1.7.8 Giving Studies Priority Over Work

Most of the students mention that they would really like to work part-time but they are concerned that they would not afford to do so because of their studies albeit the amount of experience that this would give them. They are aware that financially they are a burden on their family and for most, the latter reason, rather than gaining some sort of work experience, seems to be a priority. This would mean that College is their central community of practice and that they give priority to their studies.

I would try to work part-time but this would all depend on my studies. But I think it's important because of the money.

(Ariana, second interview)

I would be interested in working part-time because I think it's important because of the experience and you would know what the work environment has to offer. It would give you a certain advantage I think.

(Christine, second interview)

I would like to work because of the money and so I would not depend on my mum. Even because of the experience and to have a new experience. I have never worked till now. When you start working you would learn how to deal with people. You would also learn to be independent and responsible because you would have your own pay cheque.

(Kirsty, first interview)

I would work part-time but it depends on how long I would have to stay at school and at work. You need to have time to yourself as well. It's nice to work because I really hate doing nothing. In summer I go to work part-

time with kids. When I was offered a job she immediately instructed me to go with the children downstairs!

(Maria, first interview)

Yes I would work part-time if I had to come to MCAST. Perhaps because of the money... because I cannot take it for granted that my mother would give me any pocket money and so I would earn money that would be mine and so I would not really have anything to do during the weekend so I would not mind a shift in the morning.

(Melissa, first interview)

I would work part-time according to what I would have to study.

(Phoebe, first interview)

Studies remain the central focal point for the participants when weighed against the possibility of seeking part-time employment. This is in contrast to what we find for most of the participants cited in the work of Ball et al. (2000) where a good number of the interviewees are in employment. One needs to point out that Maltese students are all given a stipend which is not tied to any loan repayment. This might in some way account for the fact that Maltese students tend to prioritise their commitment at college over their commitment to work.

5.1.7.9 Learning to Live

This section has dealt with the ways in which full-time work, part-time work and work placements have influenced the thought and decision-making processes of these participants. The analysis of these experiences was informed by the concepts of vocational habitus (Colley et al., 2003) and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) but also finds applicability in the impact of self-regulatory skills on transitory experiences (Hallam, 2010); risk society (Beck, 1992); personal change (Ashforth, 2001) and influential navigation of transitions (Spiteri and DeGiovanni, 2009). It was deemed that some students were included in some communities at the expense of being

excluded from others whilst other students shifted towards combining both, or transferred their knowledge from one community to another.

5.1.8 Using Past Experiences to Make Sense of the Future

The development of this theme came about through the participants' descriptions of how they envisage their immediate future, which is when they finish their studies, and also within a few years' time. Participants described three different trajectories: The first is the "Clear Trajectory" where the participants state that they clearly know what they want and how this must be achieved; the second is the "Uncertain Trajectory" which is the path envisaged by those participants who state that they want to do a variety of things but whose discourse is made up of ideas without any clear plans; the third is the "Going for Second Best Trajectory", which is essentially a clear trajectory, coupled with a conscious decision of taking the second best choice. This is because the participant deems that the best choice for her will never be attainable. It is important to note that the participants are, at times, relatively uncertain in one sphere of life and more certain in another. This is most clearly portrayed by Maria, who strongly declares that she will terminate her studies after the National Diploma. However, what is most important for Maria is not her career, but being in charge of her own family. On the other hand, she is uncertain as to what job she will have, and also whether she would actually seek employment or not.

5.1.8.1 A Clear Trajectory: Treading a Well-Established Pathway

Here Ariana's action within this study is an individual one in that she alone seems to be waiting for a confirmation letter from MCAST indicating that she should be soon starting her course. She experiences "bounded agency" in that she has to wait before continuing her learning journey in order to finish off her studies. Obviously she cannot

proceed to read for a Higher National Diploma if she does not cover the National Diploma so her individuality is structured by external factors which are not directly under her control.

I am waiting for them (MCAST) to send me a notification letter to start school again. I would like to read for the National Diploma in Computing and then I intend to follow the Higher National Diploma. I have not decided whether I will do the top-up degree or not.

(Ariana, second interview)

Later on in the final interview, she is more decided about what she intends to do with her studies. She states that she is specializing in software and that she wants to do her top-up degree because MCAST has now started offering this possibility.

I am specializing in software and eventually I want to do my degree because now at MCAST it is official that you can do your degree.

(Ariana, third interview)

Next year I think I will start the Higher National Diploma and that I will have a car. I hope to remain with my boyfriend. I think that I will have some more time to go out next year because I will be in my first year of the Higher National Diploma because all the pressure somehow always seems to fall in the final year.

(Ariana, third interview)

Here we see that transport creates a big difference for Ariana, who has to travel considerably to get to college. In her eyes catching buses is a big waste of time which she could devote to doing other things which might be more worthwhile. Basing her experience on the national diploma she thinks that her first year in the higher national diploma will be less difficult and tense than the current year for the simple reason that it is a “first year”. Ariana makes no mention of the fact that the level might be harder and consequently more work could be involved. She is currently reading for a higher diploma in software and would like to work as a programmer.

Similarly Doanna also creates a plan of action in her line of specialisation. Having almost finished her studies in hairdressing she states that she would further her studies at Level 4 if this opportunity were to be offered at MCAST. Moreover, it also shows that her work experience has taught her a lot about hairdressing and has helped her to see future business opportunities.

If I would have the opportunity, I would keep on studying hairdressing at Level 4 but the course is not yet offered at MCAST. I would even study other things which in a way are related to help me advance in my career as a hairdresser. You would open a shop where you would do blow-dries and things related to beauty care and not only hairdressing as this is the trend nowadays! In the salon I work in, in Marsascala, we have a beautician who does clients' nails while they wait for their blow-dries!
(Doanna, third interview)

Christine and Kirsty on the other hand keep an open mind about their possibilities but seem inclined to further their studies. In her final interview Christine is however cautious about investing in another course. This is in line with what was previously discussed in this chapter in that she would not want to choose between caring for her family and the possibility of a career.

If I do really well in my course at MCAST I don't know if I would continue my studies. I was having a chat with a friend of mine a few years older than myself and he told me that he used to say that he would not continue but he did and he now works in a bank. I am not one of those who likes to study a lot so I don't know. If I would be in a job that I want I would stop but then I'll see what happens. If I get the opportunity to do the ACCA (Association for Chartered Certified Accountants) I think I would but I would like to work in the morning and study in the evenings.
(Christine, second interview)

The first thing I will do when I finish is to work so that I will earn myself some money and be able to stand on my own two feet again. I would want to buy a car. I might then start the ACCA qualification. But I really have to be sure about taking this decision of course. When you manage to attain the ACCA you would have a much better pay and you would be an accountant and not a technician like the AAT course (Association for

Accounting Technicians). There will be some exams from the ACCA for which I would get an exemption.

(Christine, third interview)

This year I am going to Higher Secondary again and I will do the matriculation course because I did not manage to get a place in the Early Years Course. I will take Maltese and Sociology as 'A' levels and Philosophy, Environmental Science, Biology and Systems of Knowledge as Intermediate. I chose the matriculation course to go to University maybe to become a teacher. I have 9 'O' levels but I do not want to go to Junior College.

(Kirsty, second interview)

Doanna, Kirsty and Christine know about the available opportunities and these are clear to them. The career pathway and the studies they would like to pursue are defined and available to them. Ariana and Doanna are demonstrating what Evans and Heinz (1993; 1994) would term as “strategic transition behaviour”. This behaviour which is normally found in Transition Type I (Evans and Heinz, 1993; 1994) is planful and very often linked to clear-cut vocational choice. Both participants also seem to be more inclined towards what DuBois Reymonds et al. (2002) term to be “trendsetters” and who are those youth who have been successful in the formal transition system. This is also true for Maria but she categorically declares that she would not do any more than is required of her to settle down in a job and shows no intention of furthering her studies in the area of health care. She is however interested in pursuing another avenue, which she would like to do as part-time work. She plans to pursue a part-time diploma in make-up and to eventually work in this area on a part-time/free lance basis. Maria and Daniela seem to be experiencing what Ball et al. (2000) term as “learning fatigue”. Like in Aaron’s case, Maria seems to have run out of steam. Unlike Ariana, Doanna and Christine, Maria’s plans are unclear. Although Daniela has been “pushed away” from studying, she still says that there might be a possibility for her to take up a course.

However, this is a remote possibility reserved for a remote future. In fact Daniela is what DuBois Reymond et al. (2002) term as “disengaged”.

I do not intend to further my studies.

(Maria, third interview)

No way! As if I would do the higher national and the top-up degree! Next year would be my last year in here. I will finish this course next year, if I finish it that is! Then you will see me walking out! I do not want to see the same building again. And my decision remains because once I stop then that is final! There will be no way for me to start again if I stop!

(Maria, third interview)

So next year if I manage and it is going to be very hard, I will try to start another diploma with the one that I am doing. I will do it in the evenings part-time in order to become a make-up artist. It will be very difficult to do two diplomas at one go. I would eventually want to work as a make-up artist. Since I want to do it, I want to get it at all costs. I did not want to do the Beauty Specialist course though!

(Maria, third interview)

No right now I do not imagine myself studying at all. But I don't know perhaps in the future I might do some sort of course.

(Daniela, third interview)

Doanna talks about her job prospects which seem to be settled. She will keep working within the salon, which has offered her practice throughout the course. Yet she talks about being scared about the change from student to full-time worker. There are clear indications about what she will do with the money that she will earn. In her discourse, Doanna always refers to liberty and freedom and the money she will earn will serve this purpose. She makes this very clear, even though her family might need financial support from her.

Next year I will be working in a salon. I am a bit scared to be honest. Now we're at school and then we will finish off and start to work. It's like a real big thing and that I will be an adult going to work and earning my own pay and also my freedom. I will be saving up so that I will go abroad

somewhere and to get my own car maybe. I would like to give the car a little face lift in my own way. It has to be my own personal thing the way I would do up my car just like the tattoos thing.

(Doanna, third interview)

Doanna is fearful about her future. Unlike the case of Rees in Ball et al. (2000) she is clear about what she wants to do but she is afraid of the responsibility that she would have to shoulder.

5.1.8.2 An Undefined Future and Unclear Routes

With regard to career aspirations, we see that Phoebe intends to further her studies in the area of merchandising more precisely in window design. This is directly linked to the work she does in sales. She is aware that work in such an area in Malta is difficult to find, but she is willing to pursue her aspirations elsewhere with the same company. She has also managed to combine what she liked doing in her spare time as a hobby, which is buying bags and accessories, to her full-time work. Phoebe also comments on the positive learning environment that there is at her place of work and she sees herself moving on up the career ladder.

I always wished to have my own shop because when I was a baby my parents owned a business. I do not wish to have supermarkets like they had but I want a boutique or household items in my store.

(Phoebe, first interview)

I would work as a window designer. It's the thing I would love to do...designing windows! For example do you know how the windows of Zara and Bershka are? That's the style I like and that is what I would like to do with my company. It's really nice but in Malta it's hard because it's much easier abroad. In Malta it's difficult to progress in your career but that is why I keep my job because as I go along I am gaining experience on how I can display items and we also have courses. Top people come from abroad come to see how we are dealing with stuff here in Malta. Our managers tell us where we are wrong and are interested in seeing that we improve. They do not shout and scare you off.

(Phoebe, second interview)

Phoebe seriously intended to go to the UK to pursue her dreams and found out more about opportunities since she also has family there. However, her closeness with her family and the heavy financial investment seemed to be a high risk and put her off this decision. When back in Malta she also points out that deep down there is the intention that she might continue studying, but her work makes it very difficult for her.

I went to the UK for 17 days at the end of May in 2009. I was seriously considering going there. There was this opportunity in London. They give you breakfast, lunch and dinner everyday but I had to study and I gave up. But once a week you go to Top Shop and you would be shadowing the merchandiser there. But I would not have managed because I am too close to my family so I would have lost all my money in the end.

(Phoebe, third interview)

I always want to get back to studying but I find it far too hard and then I do not start anything at all. I had done a part-time make-up course at MCAST and had passed. I had done the entire first one and passed! I did this last October. In fact I have my certificate and I have not picked it up yet because I do not have the time to go to MCAST. I would have liked to continue make-up and I went with my cousin who had a baby! But in a month at work I would have to work two weeks from 9.30am to 7.30pm straight with an hour and a half of break and then a week from 1pm to 6.30pm and from a week I would work like this only three days because I would have to replace others on leave. It's hard to take leave because since I am a manager now I have to find someone to replace me. I feel I am doing very well now because I am happy even with the staff.

(Phoebe, third interview)

Phoebe's transition is somewhat "stagnant" (IRIS Report, 2004). Her wish to study is stifled by continuous interruptions and this may eventually case her to risk exclusion. Like the case of Jolene in Ball et al. (2000) she finds work to be "tiring" but eventually aspires to have the ideal working situation and a family of her own. However, what is mainly missing here is the link between the present and the future. Like the case of Rees in Ball et al. (2002), Phoebe is disheartened in pursuing her field of studies and has no clear plan on how to achieve her aims.

5.1.8.3 Refusing Uncertainty

Melissa also has clear plans for the future. She insists that she would have a career in childcare although in reality she then applied for the National Diploma in Care. This decision might have been spurred on by the fact that by 2015, according to directions by the European Union, all practitioners working with children aged 3-8 must possess a first degree. MCAST however, had not at the time of the final interview established a higher national diploma and top-up degree in the area.

My plans are that I would take child care and then I would be able to have my own classroom and to become a kindergarten teacher. I always wanted to become a kindergarten teacher. I love to play with children and I always took care of my sister so that no-one else would touch her. I know that there will be some changes and that the Higher National in Early Years would not be offered just yet. I am ready to further my studies should the requirements change. I have been here two years already and if I was ready to do these, it means that I am ready to finish the entire course up to the end.

(Melissa, first interview)

If the child care course is not offered I will further my studies in care. Our teacher told us that in care we would also be able to work with children.

(Melissa, second interview)

Eventually Melissa opted out of childcare and, in her final interview, she seems to be “navigating in transition” (Evans and Furlong, 1997). The educational pathway for childcare in her eyes is still very unclear and it is restrictive in the job openings that it offers. These are the reasons why she opts out of it.

I had not taken childcare because the pathway is still unclear and it is still not very clear as to what you need to do or study to become qualified. I preferred to be surer in my decision and to have a lot of openings then to take a course which is known to be more difficult and restrictive. With care, I can still work with children.

(Melissa, third interview)

I would like to continue once I finish my National Diploma in Health and Social Care. I would like to enrol for the higher national diploma and then

the top-up degree in health and social care. I am doing well in my results and I have attained everything.

(Melissa, third interview)

Melissa has no intention of quitting her studies in health and social care. The fact that she is doing very well spurs her to continue her studies until she would have attained her degree. For Evans and Furlong (1997) navigation portrays how young people, in this case as applied to Melissa, take action towards their own aims and targets. Melissa's decision has structural boundaries but she remains focused and navigates through clearly defined pathways which would still eventually lead her to work with children. Hence this thesis has uncovered a different type of transition to those portrayed by Evans and Heinz (1993; 1994).

As discussed in the literature review, Evans and Heinz (1993; 1994) have identified different transitional pathways pertaining to the different trajectories that individuals undertake. The first type of transition is defined by them as “strategic transition behaviour”. This transition is planful, very often linked to a clear-cut vocational choice and to definite occupational goals. This behaviour was found to exist among young people in Trajectory I, namely those who are moving towards higher education. In this thesis a similar kind of transition is described in section 5.1.8.1 and which I will refer to as Trajectory A. The only distinction being that these students are not following courses in higher education but in further education. The fourth and final type of transition behaviour described by Evans and Heinz (1993; 1994) is termed “wait and see” and is characterised by an attitude of learned helplessness, where one is happy if the situation does not get worse and there is a vague hope that the situation will get better in the future. This type of transition (Type B) which I have described as “stagnant” is demonstrated by Phoebe in section 5.1.8.2.

5.1.8.4 Choosing Between Potential Family Commitments and Careers

The data indicates that participants seem to belong in either one of two groups: On the one hand we have those who aspire to have a family and to raise their own children whilst on the other there are those who have no such aspirations.

Ariana also seems to be very clear in her plans in that she is aiming to work at home while being able to care for her family. In her interviews she mentions that her uncle is in fact a programmer and her boyfriend is into IT but he is focusing on networking.

In ten years time I will be a programmer and I will own my own home. I will be married and perhaps have a kid or two. Raising a family will be easy for me because programmers can always work from home and the time can be flexible.

(Ariana, third interview)

Furthermore, Christine also talks about being in a stable relationship. We see that her perceptions have changed from an idealized version of love to thinking about the hard work that keeping up a relationship entails. She also points out that having a family is much more important to her than actually furthering her studies but she states that progressing through her ACCA is possible even though she would be in a stable relationship.

It's nice to be in relationship with someone where you would love one another kind of. But then I do not know at all because I have had a very bitter experience so I say its better to be on my own but then there are those moments where I feel alone and you would want someone to share your life with. It's really nice to be in a relationship where both are happy! It's like before I used to think that relationships are perfect but now I think about maintaining a relationship which is a lot of hard work. It's also really difficult to find someone like that to share your life with and I do not only think it's difficult for females but it's also hard for males. It's hard to find someone who is really capable of undertaking a serious relationship. This

has not changed my attitude towards my career either because at the end of the day I still dream that I would find that someone with whom I would be able to share my life with. The fact that I would get my ACCA and also having a boyfriend are not competing but I see them as moving along together now. But doing the ACCA is still a question mark for me because having my own family is more important. In ten years time I might have my own kids. But I don't know! But if I think about it then that is how I see myself as a mum with my own kids!

(Christine, third interview)

Phoebe talks about her future as housewife if she could afford being so. She talks about the fact that her cousin although 19 years of age, had a baby and this has shown her that being a mother would be a priority for her in life. Nevertheless, she also talks about her career as being important in that she points out that she might not want to leave a particular post if she felt that she was doing particularly well in it.

In ten years time I think I will be at home and with my husband working for me. My cousin had a baby and she is still 19. She was the quiet one and I was the naughty one! No-one expected her to get pregnant but the little one has shown me that I would like to have kids and to raise them myself. The little free time I have, I go to play with the little one. It's nice to be able to stay at home and to raise your own kids. But you have to consider things at that point in time because my family might need my earnings or perhaps I would have a position that I would not like to leave.

(Phoebe, third interview)

Maria also talks about having her own family and about her career. She points out that having a career is secondary to her own wishes to have a family but she sees herself as being busy in the future.

Having children is obvious if you want to get married. But for that there is plenty of time? The most important thing for me is to get engaged and eventually married and not to have a career. Having a career will come slowly. I want a baby when I am 29 years old. It's my lucky birthday and I want a baby. I would be married and working and with a long line of children following me and I would always be extremely busy!

(Maria, third interview)

On the other hand, for Melissa, the present seems to centre round her self and there is no mention of any significant other. This seems to also reflect her remote future

where she does not even mention any plans for having her own family but for working with children.

I hope to have a good job in ten years' time and to be able to work with children even though I liked the placement on domestic violence. But I want to work with children and I wanted to do so ever since I was a kid myself!

(Melissa, third interview)

Doanna shows that she takes her own responsibilities very seriously. She thinks that ten years are too far ahead to think about. She talks about this as follows:

In ten years time I would really like to have my own salon but I am really scared. I am really scared of the responsibility. It's a big big responsibility to have your own salon. You have to have some years of experience to have your own salon. But personally I think that 10 years are too far ahead and I have no idea of what I will be doing. I might be in relationship or I might be abroad. I can tell you what I might be doing but it's still too far off for me to imagine!

(Doanna, third interview)

Daniela states that in ten years time, she will have no idea about what she will be doing. She talks about the example of the car she bought where she opted for second hand one because she did not want to worry about paying instalments in the future. She maintains that she would want to work for Emirates as a cabin crew member but since she was always in a relationship, this impeded her from applying. Now that she is single once again, there is nothing which would stop her.

In ten years time, I do not know what will happen. I did not buy a new car so I bought a cheaper second hand one because I do not want to worry about instalments. I would eventually like to work as a stewardess with Emirates and I always wanted to apply but when the applications were out I was always dating so this created problems. I have friends working there and they have very good working conditions and they are very happy.

(Daniela, third interview)

5.1.8.5 Navigating Transitions: Leaving Footprints

This final section of the analysis has portrayed that future ambitions for these participants is more or less shaped by the past and present. Most of the participants mention new kinds of responsibilities which they would have to undertake. It seems unquestionable to some of them that children could be the responsibility of both parents or entirely of the father. Staying at home and being able to rear your own kids seems to be the best aspiration for some of the participants and in their words it seems as the ideal world where their husband would be responsible for providing for the entire family. Further education for Christine and Ariana centres on the possibility of being able to care for their family. For Melissa and Daniela who had just finished off long-term relationships, future aspirations centred entirely on their own self. For Melissa, the ultimate aim is to get her degree whereas for Daniela success would mean managing her business with profit or being able to work for Emirates as cabin crew. The same could be said for Doanna who would have liked to stay on at MCAST should there have been a further opportunity in hairdressing. Construing a definite future amidst only a few certainties seems to be an arduous task for the participants.

5.2 The Proposal for a New Model for Understanding: The Self in Transition

This section shall draw the main points arising from the analysis of this chapter and shall propose a new model for understanding transitions. The chapter gave an outline of the pathways that the participants of this research underwent as well as the themes arising from the analysis of the data gathered for this study.

This analysis seems to indicate that experiences are varied and are themselves shaped by what the participants underwent during their primary as well as their secondary years of schooling. Moreover the participants developed their own set of

constructs to help them make sense of their experiences and no participant could be seen other than an individual with the strict application of what the term implies: Participants individually develop their own set of constructs to help them make sense of the world and themselves (Fournier, 1996). This could be seen to occur to a certain extent because the point of departure for these participants was that they all attended the same secondary school and they all intended to further their education at MCAST. Yet, their experiences both at secondary and primary school, their intentions to further their education and subsequent decisions during this period of transition resulted in different courses, types of work in which they were employed as well as changes in what they wanted to do as adults for the future. Their experiences ranged from what was going on at home with their parents and siblings, friendships at school and at work, relationships with teachers and lecturers, their experience at school including work placements, part-time work as well as for two of the participants, full-time work. All instances and experiences contributed to decisions that the participants took in favour or against a particular course of action within this transitory period.

Furthermore, one would note that the transitory period went far beyond that of deciding a course of action for a career in that it also shaped the participants' values and characters in the line of the career that they were ultimately willing to pursue or are up to this point in time, aiming to pursue. Decisions about these careers were also, in particular, shaped around the values. These values had been inculcated in them by their families, mostly by their mothers, when discussions about child-rearing responsibilities in the future took place.

Another salient issue is the way in which the participants talked about life at college and life outside college. For Christine and Doanna, life within their village of

origin is totally separate to what goes on at College. It can be said to be almost remote. For Christine who comes from a very closely-knit family there is a struggle to maintain these worlds apart for the sake of cultivating her own privacy. This is because she feels that her mother would take over her entire life. For Doanna, it is important to keep her private life and college apart, because she feels that she is not understood at home. For others such as Ariana and Maria, their friends at MCAST are the same friends that they have in other places and contexts, although both are now in a long-term relationship which also influences them and motivates them to pursue their studies. For Melissa, her primary aim is coming to college and to being a success in her studies. Everything else for Melissa revolves around this decision.

Some concepts from foreign research literature undoubtedly served their purpose more than others in their applicability of the findings of this thesis. Ball et al. (2000) refer to the macro context as socioscapes. *“London plays a key paradigmatic but largely unacknowledged role in UK theorizing.”* (Ball et al. 2000: 148) Like London, Malta offers a particular context or socioscape which is characterised by its smallness and insularity as an island. Moreover, contrary to findings by Ball et al. (2000), leisure per se in the sense of going out and in particular shopping, clubbing and DJing as hobbies were barely mentioned by the participants of my study possibly because they are females. Although social circles are of course important, leisure activities in this transition period seem to make way for other factors such as part-time work, full-time work, studies and even long-term boyfriend-girlfriend relationships. On the other hand the family in the Maltese context plays a very important role and needs to be given more importance. The participants were either fully-supported by their families or were deemed to be a “nobody” in the family structure. The latter case seems to be the case of Doanna whose parents relatively ignored her desires to change course and career path. With regard to

the applicability of theories related to the psyche of the individual, one could say that these were applicable or further discussed on a case-by-case basis. Such is the case with regard to the concepts of personal change and role innovation and Maria. These concepts, as presented by Ashforth (2001), provided an “either-or” scenario. For Maria, her change could neither be deemed personal change nor role innovation as she decided to create a back-up plan via a part-time course in make-up and via her part-time work opportunities.

Understanding transitions at all levels namely macro, meso and micro is useful up to a certain degree. This thesis has indicated that transitions are largely individual and even at the micro level we need other theories which focus on the psyche. I will refer to these theories as “nano-structures” in order to understand the processes at play. Examples of such theories which were useful in this thesis are those proposed by Evans (2002:2007); Ashforth (2001); Bourdieu (1990); Bettis (1992); and Bandura (1997) to name a few. These theories serve to give a fuller picture of what goes on in the transition of an individual with its own peculiarity. Moreover the subjectivity used by each reader necessitates these theories. As Quinn (2006:4) puts it, it seems that *“we are always lost in transition, not just in the sense of moving from one task or context to another, but as a condition of our subjectivity”* (Quinn, 2006:4).

5.2.1 The Application of Literature to the Maltese Context

This thesis has determined that for these participants, changes in the self were of varying degrees. One of the participants witnessed changes in her physical self by changing image. However this change emerged from a necessity to express the inner self. Other “personal changes” (Ashforth, 2001) were, for example, the necessity of becoming more extrovert for Ariana because of the presence of males in the classroom.

Christine, on the other hand, became more pensive and aware of the way she would speak in front of others. Melissa was aware of how her behaviour should change with different groups of people and became more patient through the experiences she had on work placement. There was only one attempt at “role innovation” (Ashforth, 2001). This was in the case of Doanna who went on with piercing even though this was against MCAST college rules.

Although all the participants attended the same secondary school and had the intention of attending MCAST, as a tertiary Institution, all of them ended up pursuing different paths. This supports previous research (Karousou, 2008) that transitions are unique to every individual. Furthermore different factors such as family, school and work have the potential of creating different “persona” (Jung, 1928) or identities within the same participant and these can at times be incompatible. Such is the case of Maria who seems very noncommittal at school and very hardworking on her various jobs. Moreover, the instances of “bounded agency” (Evans, 2007) demonstrated in this thesis were varied. This shows that participants contended with structure which created boundaries for their actions. These boundaries are created by structures and habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) which ensure the status quo. Maria, for example, showed initiative by trying to buy a car, but she was not allowed to do so because she did not have a stable job as required by the bank. In another instance, Phoebe declares that she not want to attend Junior College, because she thinks that she would be tied down to subjects, which she would not like. Her past experience at the secondary school, thus influences her decisions about her future.

Another concept applied to this research is the one postulated by Bettis (1996). “Liminality” mediates the goings-on of the world with the daily life of the student creating

interplay between the macro and the micro worlds. For Christine her micro world is affected by the macro world of the unknown. In fact in her second interview she chooses not to comment in the way that she used to at secondary school for fear of hurting her colleagues whom she does not know as well as the friends she previously had.

“Individualisation” (Beck, 1992) is another theoretical concept which was useful to this study. It is about how individuals inside and outside the family become the agents of their livelihood, which is mediated by the market as well as their biographical planning and organisation. This could be seen by all the participants, in the study, at the different stages within or outside their family. Individualisation is structured according to Evans (2007) but it is better termed as “bounded agency” in that the focus moves on the participants as planning centres and actors without losing however the influence of structure.

With regard to the role of the family, findings seem to indicate that it is in general much more directive towards the end of compulsory schooling and that this direction seems to ease off the older the participants get. Moreover, advice-seeking and referring to parents seems to become much more of a choice than an obligation the older the student gets. The family on the other hand could still be somewhat “vigilant” (Allatt, 1993) with regard to the personal relationships which these students want to pursue. Particular evidence of this was seen in Christine’s case, and she seemingly had a harder time in finding ways of separating herself from her mother.

Furthermore, for Christine, the issue of raising a family seems to be very important and she seems to tie it down to the eventual opportunity of her raising her own children. Christine explicitly points out that this would be her duty as she is a female.

This inclination seems to have been indirectly induced by her mother, as Christine declares that she was always there for the family. Here Bourdieu's (1990) notion of "structuring structure" is once again evident. Christine does not want to invest that much in her career by going to University, as she is a female and is willing to give this up in order to take care of her own family in due course. This "structuring structure" fuels the "structured structure" given to her by her family of origin and endorses the belief that child care is a duty for females who should readily give up their careers for this purpose.

With regard to friends, the theoretical concept which was most applicable to this thesis was the one which dealt with engagement. This concept is best portrayed as a continuum, where at one extreme we would put total disengagement, and at the other, total engagement. Daniela perhaps offers an illustration of learning disengagement (Kelly, 2009). Disengagement occurs when an anti-school value system is supported particularly when students need to cope with low academic status. This disengagement comes about when the student is given messages that she does not belong to the school environment, and that any effort on her part in relation to schooling will not be fruitful. Students then feel that they do not belong and collectively "decide" to give up their studies in order to work. One needs to point out that Daniela was disengaged from formal learning, as she referred to her ability of learning at work a number of times. Others were engaged in different ways: Phoebe claims that her decision to work was entirely her own and Maria was encouraged by her family to pursue her studies. The remainder of the participants were engaged because at least initially they all intended to pursue a particular course programme.

A number of participants pointed out that teachers did not bother about actually teaching them because they belonged to the weakest class in the secondary school.

Rosenthal (1973a; 1973b) points to the warmer climate that teachers tend to create for higher-expectancy students; a warmth that can be both verbal and non-verbal. Teacher expectancy effect tends to lower expectations for those students who are apriori deemed to be less capable than the rest of the cohort. Moreover, MATSEC ordinary level certification with its emphasis on academic rather than vocational subject matter have been a strong measure of self-worth (Chetcuti, 2001). Reay (2001) points out that education for the working classes has traditionally been about failure and about being found out.

All the participants in the study engaged in some sort of work experience. Two of the participants engaged in full-time work and never committed themselves to full-time studies again. The other participants were involved in summer jobs, part-time work experiences and work placements. The literature which helped to make sense of these experiences included Hallam's (2010) work on the development of expertise, Wenger's (1998) Community of Practice, and Colley, James, Tedder and Diment's (2003) Vocational Habitus. The work of these theorists was useful in explaining how lives at school and college as well as life at work were conducive towards the development of expertise. The good majority of the propositions by Hallam (2010) found applicability to this study in the experiences of the individual participants. Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998) and Vocational Habitus (Colley et al., 2003) were less specific to the individual participants but found more general applicability of the issues under discussion. "Vocational Habitus" helps describe the fact that Vocational Education and Training (VET) does encourage a "reflexive project of the self" but this project is often tightly bounded, both in relation to one's existing habitus and in accordance with a disciplinary discourse about the self that one has to become. This is the case of Christine, who, as an adolescent, already decides to give up her studies in order to avoid

choosing between a career and her family in the future. Vocational habitus helps to convey the pull of a vocational culture to include (and to exclude) people from certain social groupings such as what happened to Daniela and her damaged learner identity. Feelings and morals also have to be learned along with thoughts and actions as is found in the case of Melissa on her reflections about her work with the homeless. Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) reflect what was described by Jung's when putting forward his concept of the persona but apply it to the notion of groups at work. For Wenger (1998:6) communities sprout *"in the classroom as well as on the playground, officially and in the cracks"*. Phoebe and Daniela seem to have experienced all the stages of a community of practice. Other participants have touched upon communities of practice as part of their studies or as part-time employment. For Phoebe and Daniela, what was meant to be initially a summer job became a job to which they fully belonged and they both helped to develop. They have even trained new staff within the Communities of Practice in which they belonged. Phoebe started as a "novice" and gradually became an "expert" in the first outlet in which she worked. In her new position at "Jennyfer's" she realises that although the sector is essentially the same, the practice differs. Moreover as highlighted by Fuller and Unwin (2004) we find that the distinction between "expert" and "novice" is not that clear cut, since Phoebe found herself being retrained even though she was employed at a higher level than her trainer. Moreover, Phoebe takes to "Jennyfer's" the knowledge that she acquired from "Things".

Of particular use throughout my study was the model proposed by Ball et al. (2000) in that it provided the main underlying framework for this study. Ball et al. (2000: 148) state that *"our focus upon education, training and work marginalises or obscures other points of focus that may be really much more important in the lives of the young people"* (Ball et al., 2000: 146). Their model which is found in Figure 3.3 entitled "Arenas for

Action and Centres of Choice” gives equal importance to three defined areas which are: “ Family, Home and Domesticity”, “Work, Education and Training” and “Leisure and Social Life”. Although in this thesis, other areas apart from Work, Education and Training were important for the participants, it is important to note that leisure activities were not really a salient issue which could be given any importance.

With regard to trajectories, this thesis has indicated that the participants seemed to belong to one of three. Two of the trajectories namely A and B, discovered for the participants in this thesis are in ways similar to the ones developed by Evans and Heinz (1993;1994) but there are of course differences. The first type of transition defined by Evans and Heinz (1993; 1994) is “Strategic Transition Behaviour”. This transition is planful, very often linked to a clear-cut vocational choice and to definite occupational goals. This behaviour was found to exist among young people in Trajectory I, namely those who are moving towards higher education. For easier reference and distinction, I refer to this Trajectory as Type A. The only distinction between Type 1 (Evans and Heinz 1993; 1994) and Type A uncovered in this study is that these students are not following courses in Higher Education but in Further Education. The fourth and final type of transition behaviour described by Evans and Heinz (1993; 1994) is termed “wait and see” and is characterised by an attitude of learned helplessness, where one is happy if the situation does not get worse and there is a vague hope that the situation will get better in the future. This type of transition (Type B) which I define as “stagnant”. Nevertheless, this thesis has uncovered another type of trajectory which bears no similarity to those discovered by Evans and Heinz (1993; 1994). Such a trajectory is uncovered by Melissa who opts out of childcare. The educational pathway for childcare in her eyes is still very unclear and is restrictive in the job openings that it offers. Melissa, took action towards her own aims and targets. Her decision has structural boundaries

but she remains focused and navigates through clearly defined pathways which would still eventually lead her to work with children by taking the second best option which is a pathway in care. This transition which I entitle “Refusing Uncertainty” (Type C) is a different type of Transition to those portrayed by Evans and Heinz (1993; 1994).

Although the findings from this study cannot be deemed to be conclusive, on the macro level, the collective data gathered from the participants seems to point out that the Maltese Islands operate somewhere between the universalistic and liberal regimes (IRIS Report, 2004). Malta seems somewhat universalistic because there is some choice within the education and labour markets but it is also liberal because most students are engaged in part-time employment at least in the summer months. Although families play an important part, this is not out of necessity but because they want to be involved in the lives of their children. Furthermore there are links between education and employment opportunities and very few diploma holders or graduates end up in long waiting periods.

In their concluding chapter Ball et al. (2000) state that their exercise is the outcome of a struggle with the data, themselves, and their worlds. They nevertheless propose “arenas for action” which can be seen as a product of choices as young people negotiate “their own way into adult life” (Wyn and Dwyer, 1999:7), but they are also, for some, not negotiable due to constraints. These “arenas for action” have been described in the literature review of this study with (de) emphasis given according to what is deemed as more prevalent in the Maltese context. An example of this is the MATSEC scenario and the more pervading influence of the family. The initial section of this chapter has also spoken about transition regimes which would help the reader locate Malta in the socio-political scenario. I would like thus to propose the representation of my

understanding as given to me through the analysis of my research, using Figure 5.1 below:

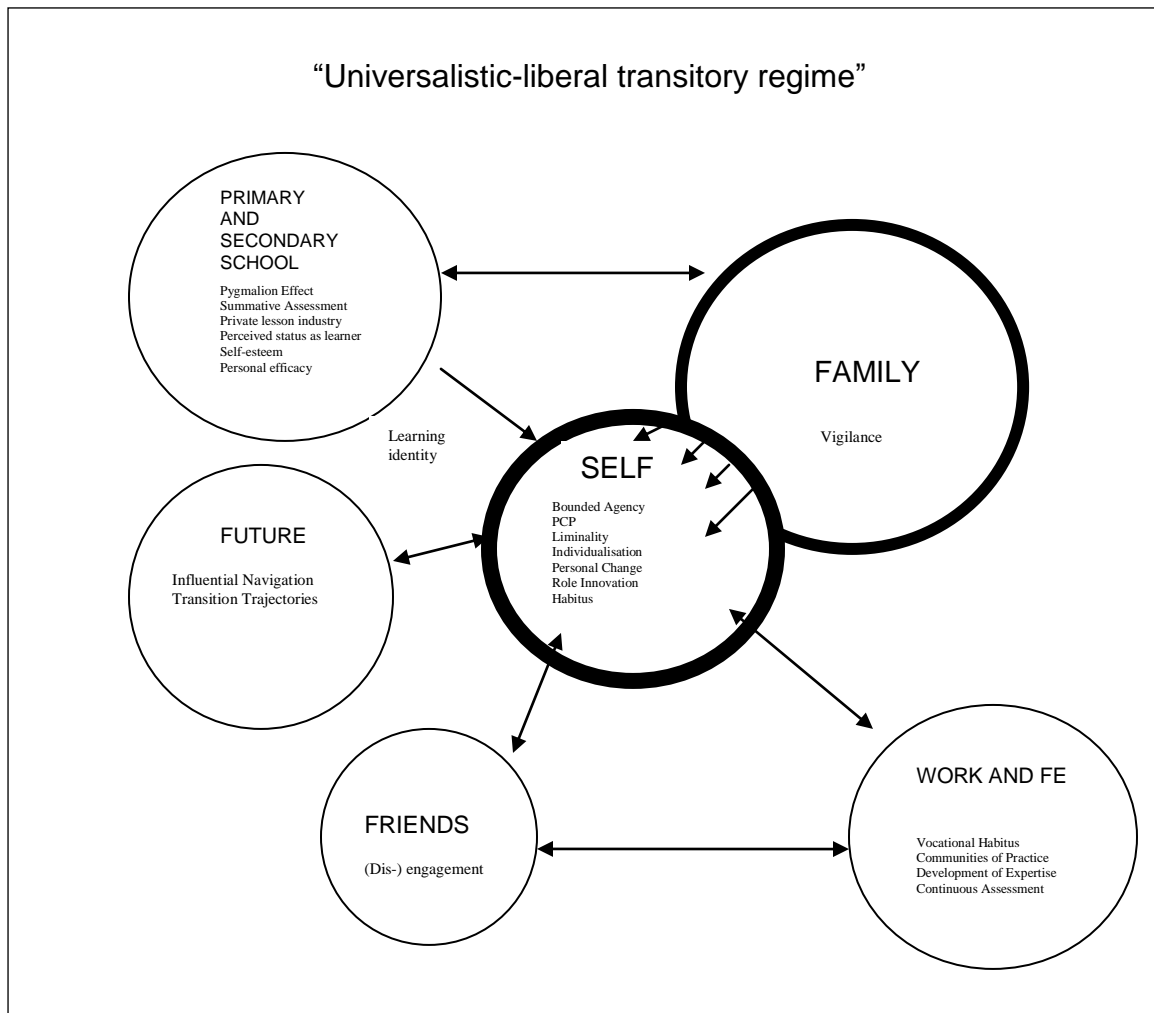


Figure 5.1. The Self in Transition

Within the model, the regime refers to the sociospace inherent in this research situation. The regime can be, on the one hand, defined as “universalistic” because young people in Malta have choice within education and the active labour market. As long as they remain active individuals are entitled to allowances, wages or benefits thus reflecting motivation for personal development in citizenship. However, the sociospace also has elements of the “liberal” regime because in this particular research the participants chose avenues clearly geared towards early labour market integration and

economic independence. The liberal aspect also reflects itself in the sense that individual responsibility is reflected in a flexible system of education and training whilst measures are implemented for the most vulnerable to participate. Here the most vulnerable are those participants who did not attain any certification from their secondary school but were offered a foundation course as another opportunity to succeed. Here the universalistic-liberal regime is used not only as a socioscape but also to clearly define the kind of context in which this model may be applied in practice.

The family is in bold because of its domineering importance in the culture arising from geographical closeness and needlessness of relocation. The arrows within the circle depicting the self indicate a motion which moves away from the family. Therefore the model shows that individuals gradually become separate from their family of origin (Individualisation, Beck; 1992). For some, particularly Christine, this may be more laboured than for others. However the family is still deemed to be very important in the support and decisions taken by the individual and whether in Malta the individual ever becomes completely cut off from the family of origin is disputable.

The self is also influenced by what went on during compulsory education in that it carries with it a perceived status of learner as well as opinions about self-esteem and self-efficacy. The self thus functions within a habitus formed by interactions and experiences acquired at the previous schools. This function is further exacerbated or undermined by the influence that FE and work are having. By means of organisational socialisation and communities of practice, work and FE (particularly where work placements are concerned) impinge on the personal change of the individual. The individual also has the potential of leaving an impact on the workplace and in so doing influences the future with regard to potential employment by means of “influential

navigation” (Spiteri and DeGiovanni, 2009). This was mostly seen in the cases of Phoebe and Daniela who opted for full-time employment and never attended an FE institution on a full-time basis. Both Phoebe and Daniela left a positive impression at their workplace and they were respected for what they were able to contribute. Likewise students on work placement are offered part-time and full-time employment if they perform well and their skills are appreciated and consequently industry asks for particular graduates to serve their needs. Both work and FE are sources for learning for the participants in that they gained knowledge which was useful to them in taking their decisions and also in developing their expertise. New friends are formed both at the workplace and also at college. However the participants mentioned other friends who are not attending their current workplace or whom they have maintained from the village in which they live. These too provided sources of support and influenced the transition of the participants of this study. On the other hand the student as the individual self also takes decisions about influences friends and friendships. The self chooses the kinds of friendships that it wants to form and maintain and it also influences the friends (other individuals) themselves through the sharing of opinions, choices and also peer pressure.

Towards the final part of the study, just when the participants were concluding their teenage years, another factor which seems to shape the transitions of these participants emerged. The participants were thinking about their future in that those following an FE course were thinking about job prospects whereas those already in work were thinking about different possibilities for the future. The participants were aware that they were in a position to shape their future but they were also conscious of the fact that the future albeit unknown was shaping their own decisions. This gave rise to the identification of three different types of trajectories, namely: “Clear”, “Stagnant” and “Refusing Uncertainty”.

I conclude this section by emphasising that this model makes use of a macro-context. Karousou (2008) does not cover this aspect in her model whilst Ball et al. (2000) mention this as “socioscapes” throughout their text but do not make specific reference to it in their “Centres of Choice and Arenas for Action”. The macro context is useful as it determines to what extent the other factors in the model may operate. Although far from conclusive, the experiences gathered by the participants from this thesis seem to operate within a mix of two particular regimes, or as Ball et al. (2000) define it, “socioscape(s)”. Participants seem to operate within a universalistic regime (IRIS Report, 2004) because they have choice even within education and the active labour market. This choice is combined with entitlements to allowances, wages or benefits, as long as they remain active thus reflecting the centrality of motivation for personal development in citizenship. The participants in this thesis also seem to operate within a “liberal regime” (IRIS Report, 2004) because they belong to a country where policies are much more clearly geared towards the early labour market integration and economic independence of young people. On the one hand, individual responsibility is being promoted but the system is not as yet very flexible. On the other hand, there are measures for the most vulnerable to participate. Policies exert pressure to ensure that young people do not remain unemployed and dependent on social benefits. Flexible spaces are thus counteracted by individualised risks and pressure.

5.2.2 Limitations of the Self in Transition Model

There are two main limitations of the model which were not addressed through my research. The first is that the social background of the student (as indicated in Karousou’s work, 2009) could be an important contributing factor to the nature of transitions. Furthermore, the relationship of different transitory regimes to the other factors of the model could not be explored by the type of interview questions and the

type of participants employed in thesis. This would have necessitated different units of analysis in that policy makers and economists would be needed to determine the type of transitory regime within Malta as a small island state.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has started off by outlining the techniques used to elicit the themes in this research. There were eight, key, emergent themes which were extensively reported in this chapter. These themes lead into the development of “The Self in Transition Model” which outlines possibilities for youth in transition based on the findings of this research. In the next chapter, the strengths and limitations of this research and proposals for future research as well as its applicability for the educator as well as the policy maker shall be discussed.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the analysis of the data gave rise to eight main themes which in turn led into the development of “The Self in Transition Model”. This model looks at the self as the central agent with factors such as the family and friends, the future, work and further education (FE), able to influence the pathway that these individuals undertake. Hence, these factors, in turn, influence the self in transition through the themes which were explored in the previous chapter. This is reflected through the kind of individualised pathway that the self is able to construct. Although compulsory education had taken place prior to the exploration of the journey of the participants, it is also considered to be an influential factor. Moreover, the self adopts different identities in response to the factors that it is in contact with and it adopts multiple persona: Daughter within the family, friend, apprentice on placement or worker, student and future adult with or without family responsibilities. The development of different persona is tied down to the Psychology of Personal Constructs (PCP). According to PCP, people develop their own set of constructs to help them make sense of the world and themselves (Kelly 1955). Personal Construct Psychology proposes that two different persons are likely to develop different constructions of the same event. Moreover, since change takes place from within construction systems which are individually created by different people, it is likely to follow different directions for different individuals.

In section 6.1, I will synthesise my findings for this thesis by taking into account the research questions that I posed in the previous chapters. Here, I will look at the experiences that shaped this period of transition, the factors that influence these

transitions, the students' lives in general and the concepts in the existing literature that have helped me, as the researcher, to make sense of this period in the students' lives.

In Section 6.2, I address the strengths and limitations of this research whilst in Section 6.3, I propose some recommendations for policy makers and educational practitioners as well as discuss some proposals for future research. In the final section I conclude this thesis by providing some reflections on the study and some concluding remarks.

6.1 Synthesis of Findings

In this section, a synthesis of the findings of my research in relation to the original research questions is presented. The first question focuses on the experiences that the students encountered throughout this transition period namely perceived personal change, the maintenance and development of relationships and the learning that they needed to undertake.

6.1.1 RQ 1: What can we discover about the experiences that shape transition for 15-18 year old Maltese students?

This study has revealed meaningful experiences which the students underwent throughout this period of transition. Students mentioned experiences which they deemed to be worthy of mention and which for them brought about an amount of self-reflection and perceived personal change. Although this was not so apparent between the first and second interviews, all students mentioned that they had personally changed by the time the third interview took place. They also referred to the ways in which they experienced one or more of these personal changes. The changes they mentioned were not essentially related to the studies or to the work that they were doing, but were related to

other factors and are part of their general life. The study has revealed that students do not only learn about subject matter at work or at college, but they also learn about other things such as values and behaviour as indicated by Goodwin (2007). They learn about personal capabilities and how to adapt to different people at college, on placement and at work. They learn about social interactions and about the type of friendly clique that they want to spend time with at college. They also learn about personal relationships and about degrees of trust. These other things that they learn can in turn shape their wants and desires for the future.

Another type of experience relates to the relationships that these adolescents chose to maintain, discard or change. The relationship with the family is gradually seen to be changing with the individual moving away from the tightly knit family structure which was inherent earlier on in the study. Gradually participants came to realise that they are a separate entity with different needs and desires. On the other hand most parents realised that, gradually, their daughters needed to move away from depending heavily on their support and to foster independence at these stages. The experience started to be observed by the participants closer to the final stages of the study. They talk about the fact that making it on one's own is difficult. They comment on the fact that their parents are no longer there for them for each and every step of the way in their journey. Another experience which most participants encountered is that of having a boyfriend and a serious relationship. Some of them see this as a good experience whilst for others it was denoted as something which ultimately gave them a lot to learn from. In Maria's case, for instance, her relationship seemed to determine what decisions she would take in other spheres of her life. She would still pursue her part-time jobs even if she was finding school difficult to cope with because her ultimate aim is to save up enough money in order to get married.

Relationships with teachers as particular experiences were also very prominent in the study. Most commented on the laissez-faire attitude that educators in secondary school had towards them as students. They either directed them towards MCAST in the hope of them studying or else gave them the impression that MCAST was second best when compared to other tertiary educational institutions. Furthermore, students commented on their experience in class as teachers were not bothered about teaching them because they were deemed to be less capable than students placed in the other classes. Distinctions between teachers or rather lecturers were also made within MCAST. Participants described some lecturers, as being mostly helpful, but also talked about other lecturers, who tended to leave all the assignments for the end of the academic year. They also talked about some lecturers having a hard time in controlling the class and about the availability of the lecturers since at secondary school level, teachers were more accessible as it was easier to find them on the premises.

Another type of relationship which was briefly mentioned was that related to colleagues and mentors at the workplace. Placements could be a positive experience and could also redirect individuals in undertaking particular pathways, which would eventually lead to similar job opportunities or otherwise. For some, part-time work experiences proved to be a social opportunity whilst for others they seemed to be a very bitter experience. These experiences helped the participants to decipher what they wanted for their future. Furthermore, participants also pointed out where they felt that such an experience was lacking, such as in the case of Ariana who would have liked an IT work placement during her course of studies. For those who embarked on full-time employment, mentoring assumed a very important role. Training and encouragement at the workplace, fuelled motivation to persevere in a career or to mould capabilities into

the undertaking of the family business. Positive work experiences could be counterbalanced by the kind of shift roster which eventually led to a change in jobs.

Another issue which some of the students experienced was related to assessment. During secondary school most assessments were carried out through tests, whilst assessment at MCAST is more continuous and mostly based on take-home assignments. Although participants stated that the system is fairer at MCAST, they also thought that the way the assessments were planned left much to be desired. It could also be that while the participants learned that assessment was based on different concepts, the time taken to adjust vis-à-vis time management skills was not occurring or happening at a much later stage.

6.1.2 RQ 2 : What can be discovered about factors that influence transitions from Compulsory Education to Further Education (FE) in Malta?

Families occupy a significant role in relation to the degree of, and the type of, intervention that they offer in the participants' lives. The students stated that parents were more directive with them during compulsory schooling particularly in emphasising that they should further their studies. Most parents were less concerned about the area in which studies should be furthered and some parents were in disagreement between themselves. Where there was disagreement it was interesting to note that both students eventually dropped out of full-time studies. Family commitments stemming from ill-health or from family-run businesses also influenced these transitions. For some of the students such commitments took priority over their studies. Although most parents gave more space to their daughters, along the years, to make their own choices and to learn out of their own mistakes, family ties remained strong, throughout the entire period of the study. In one of the cases, resistance from the family was evident. Doanna, reacted by

moving away as much as possible from her family in order to gain a fresh start in life, by means of her life at college and at work. Moreover, the family is the primary socializing agent and parents are also role models. Some participants indicated that they would like to take care of their own family and that this was more important for them than a career. This was outlined in section 5.1.4 which focuses on the kinds of choices and reasons for which these were taken.

For one of the participants, friends are the key referral point in the absence of support from the family. For others they are a source of support throughout their studies. For another participant, having a boyfriend is a source of alienation from studies. Both friends and teachers seem to also be highly influential with regard to choice of school or work after compulsory education. Hearing about schools, subject choices and/or types of work “from the grapevine” seems the most important source of information which was not contested during the interviews. In this study it was also significant to note that friends could influence participants to disengage from learning or otherwise.

Ordinary level examinations are another key factor or milestone which these participants had to contend with. These are mainly found as the main subject within the second and third themes. It seems that it is the major factor contributing to the final formation of a learning status. Most participants indicated that they could already assess their learning capabilities during secondary education. It was evident that these examinations were the ultimate measure of self-worth. For some, this was further endorsed during the period following the results whilst for others this was annihilated due to their success in work or in furthering their studies. Moreover, ordinary level examinations are an example of the type of examinations inherent in the primary and

secondary schools which are based on a summative type of assessment. Different assessment systems of the formative type are perceived to be fairer.

Another factor which was the subject of both the third, fourth and fifth themes, were the teachers. This thesis has served to further underline the important role that educators have in the lives of students. Teachers interpret and impart the curriculum and are key in developing a learning climate. The student-to-teacher relationship was explored and participants stated that if learning is to take place, teachers must be fully prepared but students must do their own part in that they should take notes and study. Teachers were also key in conveying a learning status to their students. Educators seem able to give messages to their students with regard to the choices that are available to them after compulsory schooling.

The relevance and worth of full-time work to what one really wants out of life was a key issue for this study. Work determined the choices that Daniela and Phoebe made with regard to their motivation to succeed and with regard to their plans for the future. Their work roster and work role influenced the changes in the jobs that they made and their thoughts on the subject with regard to their career and also potential future family commitments. For those in full-time studies, work had a different dimension in that it offered a source of information with regard to the choices they made in furthering their studies. Some of the participants also compared learning at college to what was taught at work. For some, work was a valuable source of learning whilst for others, planning to work came strictly as a second choice in order to devote more time to studying.

Although somewhat intangible, the future was another factor which influenced the transitions of the participants of this study. Choices of schools, subjects and work types

were more often than not influenced by their aspirations for the future in terms of career and family commitments. For four of the participants, becoming mothers and the role of child care in the future was key to their decision making. To them, this responsibility and pathway was deemed to be natural, legitimate and fulfilling. The data also gave rise to three different types of trajectories, namely: A clear, well-established pathway where steps taken are pre-planned and assumed to be the right ones to take; an unsure future with a lot of ideas but no concrete plan to enable their realisation; refusing uncertainty where the second best option poses less risk than the most interesting and palatable option.

The final factor under discussion is the self, which although it is in itself undergoing transition is also the main agent influencing the participant's transitions. It adapts, changes and refuses to change and also chooses the pathway through which the transition for these participants is enabled. The role of the self is mainly explored within the first theme but it is found within all the themes elicited through the data.

6.1.3 RQ 3: How do selected Maltese students at this age view College life and other aspects of life?

Although the participants of this thesis looked at life in a holistic manner, the study indicates that, when pressure assignments or exams reaches a peak, for most of the participants, duty in the form of studies or work commitments automatically takes precedence over leisure. Contrary to what Ball et al. (2000) present in their model entitled "Arenas for Action and Centres of Choice", which I presented in Chapter 3, leisure for the participants of this thesis does not feature as being an important aspect in life. Contact with the family and friends is still of course maintained, but priority for most, other than Maria and those in full-time employment, is given to studying. In relation to this is what Rose (1992: 146) in Ball et al. (2000:4) calls the "instrumental autonomy" of

the “enterprising self”: *“A calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and works upon itself in order to better itself.”* Students thus give up the opportunity to go out and to enjoy themselves during the week in order to focus on their study or work duties.

Nevertheless individual differences are still evident. Maria, for instance, views college life entirely as a means to a purpose. She wishes to get out of college as soon as possible, to get married and to live a happy life at home. Others such as Melissa, Doanna, Ariana and Christine view life at college as something to look forward to. Maria has chosen life at home possibly because of a damaged learner identity. Daniela possibly also suffered a damaged learner identity which spurred her to opt for full-time employment with very limited intention of pursuing any sort of studies in the future. For both Daniela and Phoebe, choices about work are influenced from the kind of lifestyle that they would like to have. Phoebe in fact changes job because she needed more time to help in the family business and to go out with her friends.

A final comment highlights the contribution that this thesis has made in comparison to the work by Hodkinson et al. (1996) and Ball et al. (2000). The socioscope (Ball et al. , 2000) and Horizons for Action (Hodkinson et al., 1996) provide the scenario in which transitions for these young people occur. In this thesis I refer to this as a type of transition regime where different cultures operate in different regimes hence influencing transitions in different manners. Both Ball et al. (2000) and Hodkinson et al. (1996) mainly use case studies as the way in which they choose to analyse these transitions whilst this thesis makes use of cross case analysis in that it attempted to create a working model for use in practice with Maltese adolescents. In this thesis, it was found that the family is still very important in the lives of Maltese adolescents possibly due to the fact that the participants continued to live with their family of origin throughout

their studies. Of less importance for the participants in this thesis was the concept of leisure which in fact does not feature in the “Self in Transition Model”. As a final comment both Ball et al. (2000) and Hodgkinson et al. (1996) state that their final chapter is reductionist in that it attempts to provide closure to vast amounts of recordings by means of their own analysis. I too concur with this viewpoint in that inevitably the interpretation of the text provided to me by the participants was entirely my own and it involved my own choice.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of this Research

As described in Chapter 4, this research made use of open-ended unstructured interviews. As also described by Ball et al. (2000) in their book, the interviews used in the initial phase for this thesis were far more prescriptive than the second and third rounds. In the pilot interview phase I was still defining both content and coverage of issues in order for me to obtain basic information such as demographics, which included detailed information about the family structure, which was somewhat factual. Furthermore, the agenda I presented to them in this interview constructed the students as having very little to say. This was particularly so in the first part of the interview schedule. To apply what Murphy and Dingwall (2003) to the context of my research, the initial approach of using a semi-structured interview served to compare the status quo in Malta to the foreign literature. Once the subtleties were teased out, a more open approach to unravel the issues pertaining both to the Maltese context and to the individual cases was used. In contrast the interviews carried out towards the end of the study were more open-ended in style and the vast majority of the participants seemed more at ease. Open-ended unstructured interviews allowed me to follow up issues and to phrase questions in such a way as to put informants more at ease and to elicit more detail on certain issues. Building trust with the informants, allowed me to approach

sensitive topics such as family dynamics and relationships with teachers and friends in an easier manner. It also allowed me greater flexibility in my ability to probe and to pose follow-up questions. This evolution in interviewing style is a great strength in this research.

Another strength of this research was the possibility of following seven of the participants for quite a long period of time. The original number of interviewees was nine since out of the ten recruited participants, one of them never turned up. The rate of attrition in this research was relatively low and it seems to have been helped by the smallness of scale on the Island of Malta. Participants were easily traceable and contact with those who were still pursuing their studies at MCAST was very easy to maintain. My length of service within the college also helped me to maintain contact with the participants and to pull the right strings to do so. This, on the other hand, could have imposed a “reactive effect” (South Alabama University, Accessed on 26/07/10) on the participants in that they would want to give me the answers that would be desirable to an official working at the college. Such an instance would be when the participants were asked whether they would be interested in pursuing their studies where I felt that most were not being fully sincere with their replies and insisted on replying in the affirmative even when challenged. Murphy and Dingwall (2003: 85) purport that *“all interview talk, like all other naturally occurring talk, is always socially and contextually constrained. What we say and how we say it is never divorced from the context in which we say it.”* Interview talk must be treated as social action and the informant’s purpose may not be necessarily identical to that of the researcher. Accurate representation of the participants’ reality may be only one of the goals towards which informants may be expected to orient themselves during an interview. Other purposes might include micro-political projects and favourable self-presentation (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003).

Furthermore, this research served its purpose in exploring the subject of transition between secondary and further education for females on the Maltese Islands. Since the sample size was very small, however, and since all the participants attended the same secondary school, findings cannot be generalised. The themes elicited in the analysis provide the ground for further research not only amongst females in other schools, but possibly also for males, who are about to finish their compulsory education. The information elicited is deep and provides policy makers, researchers and practitioners with pointers for implementation in the services provided both at secondary school, and also at FE colleges and institutes in Malta. Murphy and Dingwall (2003) state that qualitative interviews offer flexibility, which is particularly useful when there is little prior knowledge about the topic under investigation. As the researcher I was free to follow-up interesting leads and to open up new dimensions as they arose during the data collection

Moreover this research has also provided information about participants' internal meanings and ways of thinking. McCracken (1988: 9) in Murphy and Dingwall (2003: 83) states that qualitative interviews:

...take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the life world of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.

A clear example of this are Christine's and Ariana's reasons for pursuing particular courses, in that they intend to raise their own children eventually, thus avoiding choice between a career and house care duties in the future. Such mental structures were already apparent in the 1970's and 1980's (Darmanin, 1992), but seem to persist to date. It is however still unclear whether it is the family or the school or an interplay of

both which shapes females into this thinking, and further exploration on this theme is warranted.

The interviews were very time-consuming. Nevertheless costs incurred in travelling, and audio tapes were minimal since most interviews were carried out at my office situated on the college campus. Only two participants were interviewed outside the college and on both occasions the drive was short. Furthermore, although I am a trained psychologist, the amount of research interviews and focus groups that I have carried out are minimal and therefore there were instances where my interviewing skills might have been better. Moreover, one cannot ignore that I have personally had a difficult transition in the same time period myself coupled with the fact that I have been serving at MCAST for quite a long period of time. This might have spurred me to distort data and to attribute false interpretations to the participants' replies. Furthermore, like Ball et al. (2000; 151), my work would not have not fully accounted for the *“complex, fluid and fractured lives and identities of the young people”* and *“cannot claim to have exhausted the analytic possibilities”* of the data. This is because interviews only give limited snapshots of what is actually going on in the lives of these young people and the analysis I have given might not account for all the possibilities of interpretation of the data.

Earlier on in this section, I had also pointed out that the initial interview was more prescriptive than the later ones. Interviewees were less mature and verbose in the initial part of the research. However, throughout the entirety of the study, participants may not have recalled important information and may have lacked self-awareness. This could have shaped the outcome of the study in a different way. Furthermore in the initial stages, trust building by the participants was difficult and consequently the perceived anonymity by respondents may be low. Although the participants signed a consent form

which explained ethical considerations, a relationship of trust was hard to initialize and to maintain because I could only maintain contact which was sporadic in nature.

Data analysis was carried out using N-Vivo. However the procedure was very time consuming and it was difficult at times to take decisions as to what line of action should be taken. When compared to the work by Ball et al. (2000) it seemed evident that leisure was not given the same prominence by the participants of this thesis so it was decided that this theme could not be developed.

There were considerable delays in the process of the research due to the academic calendar at MCAST. Whenever possible, I tried to interview all the students in the same time period but this was not always possible due to work placements or to courses which had started very late in the year. More often than not, my availability owing to work commitments rested on leave periods which had to be taken during Easter, Christmas and summer recess periods. This was when the students were not available at the college making the interview schedules very difficult to manage.

6.3 Recommendations for Policy Makers and Practitioners

As I wrote and compiled my research, thoughts about what I would write about in this section kept surfacing. The most salient point I would like to make is the need of retraining of secondary school teachers. These teachers grew up and studied in an era where there was only one choice which was made by the outcome of the ordinary level examinations. On attainment of a minimum of six ordinary levels, these teachers would attend a sixth form college which then prepared them for university. Although nowadays there is a lot of choice for students, the same mentality still prevails in the minds of these

educators. Moreover, even those following the B. Ed. (Hons.) degree and PGCE courses would not know anything about further education (FE) and vocational education and training (VET) because the greater majority of them would not have experienced such a pathway unless they enrolled as mature students. Therefore it is suggested that in both undergraduate and postgraduate university courses specialising in education and/or training and development, a module about VET should be introduced within the curriculum.

Another suggestion for policy makers is to invest more heavily in career advisory services both at secondary as well as at FE levels. The workload of career advisors does not permit the attention that the individual student requires and most students enlist in courses without knowing what the courses actually entail and where they lead to. Visits organised by secondary schools to FE colleges should not be considered as an outing and a free day but as a valuable learning opportunity. Moreover, as indicated through the findings, one must make sure that students visit the Further and Higher Education Institutions that interest them. Career guidance officials must also be retrained and given supervision since they seem to be portraying FE and VET as second chance opportunities. Although MCAST may be considered as a second chance opportunity for some students, it is a legitimate choice for others. The three trajectories identified by this thesis should also inform practice for career guidance officers. Although available subject options at tertiary level have widened, it might still be possible to foster Type A and Type C transitive behavioural patterns where students not only decide about what they want to do but also construct a workable plan on achieving it. In other words career guidance at secondary school level should be about fostering agency and where possible should not lead students into “stagnant” (Type B) trajectories.

Another area which seems to warrant attention in career guidance is the gender bias that occurs when choosing subjects and course pathways. At least three of the participants chose not to attend university because of the child rearing responsibilities, which they thought that they might have to incur later on during their life. Although this mentality seems to have changed considerably during the past thirty years, for some it still prevails. Career guidance officials need to be aware of this in that this should impinge on the type of approach that they use in their sessions with students.

Personal counselling is also a necessity for the transition period to be smooth. Participants indicated that they had to face personal problems and experiences which may directly impinge on the success or otherwise of the student at post-secondary level. In fact, this research has shown that the participants do not study in a vacuum but their studies are influenced by what is going on in their personal life. The number of counsellors available at both secondary and tertiary education levels should increase so that students would have the services that they require. However, one also needs to instil a culture where individuals know when to ask for help. This research has indicated that participants were still reluctant to ask for professional help even when personal problems were quite significant.

Another area which warrants more attention is the radical shift from summative assessment to continuous assessment with the use of learning outcomes and grading criteria. Participants state that they find it very hard to adjust to the new system even though they perceive that it as fairer. However, it also transpired that those who have difficulties with time management may never learn to juggle between the enormous amount of home assignments that the BTEC system seems to require. Although assessments may be carried out in other ways, lecturers still seem to feel more

comfortable in having students prepare essays for their assessments. By the increase of programme managers taking care of each course, assignments and other methods of assessment could be balanced out in order to ease the burden off the students and perhaps enhance student retention rate.

Through this research it was also found that during secondary school practice placements, at both secondary and FE contexts are an ad-hoc procedure. Implementation of placements is still dependant on who is leading the particular school or institution. There seems to be a need to have placement planning on a more concrete basis, since they truly help the students to understand the application of the theoretical concepts that they are covering with their VET studies. Such a difference was elicited in this research between those who attended the Institute of Community Services and the Institute of Communication Technology. In the former, all students attend work placements whilst in the latter no students attend any sort of placement. Ariana, who read for diplomas in information technology, continuously pointed out the importance of having such placements in order for her to better understand what she was studying within a work context. In secondary schools, work placements would help students understand the difficulties that certain jobs would entail, and assist them in making more informed decisions about their future careers. This also ties in to a dire need for transition education which forms part of the curriculum in other countries. As this research portrays, transition during this time period is full of different factors which the student has to contend with, and specialised programmes seem to be warranted. In relation to this is the drastic change in types of assessment that the student has to contend with. Although students pointed out that the assessment system used at MCAST is fairer, they also stated that at times it is much harder due to time management issues. Thus the transition programme should explain different types of

assessments and should introduce continuous assessment, grading criteria and learning outcomes at much earlier stages during secondary education rather than the abrupt introduction at tertiary level.

As a final note, I would like to draw attention to the possibility of utilising “The Self in Transition Model” which I propose as an outcome of this research. The model serves as a reference point for any practitioner who is preparing students for transition as it makes direct reference to the key theories and findings which were relevant to this research. Furthermore, the model also proposes relationships with these theories based on their applicability on their research carried out in this thesis. The model can thus serve as a tool for educators to build transition programmes and to better inform their career guidance practice.

6.4 Proposals for Future Research

This research has served to elicit eight analytic themes each of which requires further investigation. The influence and the economic situation of the family necessitate further attention as this is the primary social structure of participants undergoing this transition. The family in the Maltese context plays a very important role also because Maltese youth tend to live with their family until they opt to live independently usually on getting married or in entering some type of more permanent intimate relationship. More research studies focusing on the influence of the family are thus recommended.

Another important stakeholder who requires more attention through research is the educator who, just like the family, has a lot of power in shaping the future by openly or subtly giving ideas to students about what they are capable of doing. As mentioned in the section about policy, greater attention is needed because of the sharp changes

which have occurred in the last ten years where FE and VET are concerned. It is not only interesting but also useful to know whether the educator is making a much needed transition: From the “either-or” dichotomous situation where one is either academically able to further his/her studies as opposed to finding a job - to a situation where there are more choices and more pathways together with a situation where jobs now need specialised VET training. In other words it would be very interesting to know what the educator feels about these new opportunities and the extent to which these educators are changing, if at all, in an attempt to finding a solution in undermining the dichotomous culture.

Future studies should also look into the social background of the student which to me was a major lacuna of this research. Although through the interviews I was able to gauge this through the data that the interviewees were giving me, the research questions I posed, did not take this issue and its impact on the study into account.

Furthermore, it was also interesting to note that leisure for females does not seem to extend any further than going out with a clique of friends and dating. None of them in general mentioned any hobbies, sports, or any other means of distraction as being part of their life. This phenomenon undoubtedly warrants further research.

Finally, it seems evident that this research was carried out on a sample of females and that studies on males are needed in order to confirm these findings or otherwise.

6.5 My Personal Reflections as the Author of this Study

Work on this thesis has encompassed six years of part-time study. These years went by very quickly in that I also had to contend with a lot of changes in my personal life, namely from married to separated, from being single to being in a steady relationship and also to being a parent. These changes were also coupled with moves I made in my career. I was a senior lecturer when I started whilst I am now in charge of one of the largest VET institutions on the Island. This I state with pride and with remorse for it took a lot of time from what I most like to do in my life which is research. As I was unravelling the themes and at the same time interviewing the students, I was also in part reliving their experience. My experience as a part-time PhD student was indeed part of my life as a whole. There were times when I had to sit down and write and give up on other things I would have liked to do such as playing with my son or having dinner with my husband. This is a reflection of what the students in the study went through when the pressure of studying and exams reached a peak or they had work commitments which did not allow them to spend time as they would have liked to. This is not to say that I did not enjoy my research as nothing could be in reality further from the truth and I also gladly gave up my vacation leave and enjoyed carrying out my analysis and writing up my research.

During this research journey, at times I found it hard to distinguish between the various backgrounds I have. Becoming a parent has made me look at students in a different light in that I really finally understood how crucial the role of an educator is and the kind of responsibility that s/he is entrusted with. This is endorsed by the findings of this research and most particularly when students talked about their experience during secondary school. My background as a psychologist placed further weight on the fact that support on a personal level is key to the success of students who are at risk and

that as much as possible we need to look into mechanisms of outreach which treat these students as significant individuals who are worthy of attention. This thesis has also opened up new insights on my work as an administrator. Dedicated lecturers are those lecturers who do not experience any futile hurdles at work and who are treated as professionals. In my experience, I have seen many occasions when displacement of frustration is vented out on students. Administrators need to allow educators the possibility to grow and develop and such feelings will inevitably then spill over towards students. They are the only professionals who need to work according to a prescribed schedule, namely a timetable, which does not change for thirty weeks.

My final reflection goes to my journey as a researcher. I had produced four research projects and had also supervised some others at undergraduate level. Nevertheless although I made a futile attempt to take on qualitative research for masters degree, this was my first experience with qualitative research. This decision encompassed an amount of growth and pain in leaving the certainty that quantitative research brings about with it. I think that this was my main struggle throughout this thesis as it completely required a change in stance. There were times when I recalled lecturing students in statistics and their comments in stating that qualitative research was easier to carry out. Although I appreciate the difficulties that statistics may bring about in the understanding of certain mathematical concepts, it brings about with it an invisible boundary which always enabled me, as the researcher to distance myself from what was going on and in keeping total control of the data. This was not possible during this thesis and I found difficulties in wording some of my thoughts and in using wording which I was not normally accustomed to in academic writing.

6.6 Final Thoughts

This chapter has served as a conclusion of this thesis. In the first section, the findings for this thesis were synthesised by taking into account the research questions that were posed. The research questions focused on the experiences that shaped the participants' period of transition, the factors that influenced these transitions and the participants' lives in general as a whole. In sections two and three of this chapter I focused on the strengths and limitations of this research as well as on recommendations for policy makers and educational practitioners. Proposals for future research were also discussed in section 6.4 of this chapter whilst personal reflections and final thoughts provide some concluding comments to the thesis.

This thesis has proposed a new model for understanding the self in transition based on the themes that were developed from the data compiled for this thesis. In the model, the self is central and gradually pulls away from the family in creating its own identity and learning or working status. The pathway that the self creates is heavily influenced by the family, friends, and plans for the future, the situation as student and/or worker and also by past experiences within primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, the self operates within a socioscape or regime but the ways in which such operations are facilitated or undermined as well as the social background of the participants were not focussed upon in this thesis.

Hence, this thesis has contributed towards improving our understanding of what goes on in transitions. It has managed to combine literature focusing on transition at the micro, macro and meso levels with literature which helps us to understand what is going on in the individual self during transition as an experience. This thesis has also pointed out ways in which Maltese participants may differ from their foreign counterparts,

particularly with regard to the importance and kinds of influence exerted by families in Malta and also by the different experience of leisure which was deemed relatively unimportant in understanding the transitive experience within the Maltese context. Moreover, transition types were re-examined and the data gave rise to three different types one of which, namely “refusing uncertainty” was not unearthed in the data presented by Evans and Heinz (1993;1994). Furthermore, through the themes which were developed and discussed, a number of factors and their role within transitions was determined and explained by “The Self in Transition Model” outlined in Chapter 5.

My concluding thought for this thesis cite Grosz in Quinn (2006: 4) who states that a subject is not an entity but a series of flows, energies, movements and capacities capable of being linked together in ways other than those that congeal it into an identity. Thus *“we are always lost in transition, not just in the sense of moving from one task or context to another, but as a condition of our subjectivity”* (Quinn, 2006:4). A key piece of learning for me as the author of this study was that individuals are continuously changing and that each and every thought, as it is formed, contributes to this continual state of flux. Each thought I had as a reaction to the literature or to the participants’ data or both together contributed to the development of this thesis, and this has contributed to overall experience of transition. Moreover the continuous changes within Further Education within the last ten years in Malta continue to endorse what Sultana (1998) states about Malta in that it is a “Mediterranean Microstate in Transition”. This thesis, entitled “Transitions Amidst Transition” also contributes to our understanding of transitions in a wider sense which do not only occur on the individual, participant level but also within socioscapes (Ball et al., 2000) which are also in themselves continuously changing.

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Appendix I

The Maltese National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

MQF Level 8	DOCTORAL DEGREE	
MQF Level 7	MASTERS DEGREE	
	POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA	
	POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	
MQF Level 6	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	
MQF Level 5	Undergraduate Diploma	VET Higher Diploma
	Undergraduate Certificate	
MQF Level 4	Matriculation Certificate	VET Diploma (Equivalent to three passes at Advanced Level)
	Advanced Level Certificate	
	Intermediate Level Certificate	
MQF Level 3	General Education Level 3	VET Level 3
	SEC Grade 1 to 5	(Equivalent to six General Education Level 3 Subjects)
MQF Level 2	General Education Level 2	VET Level 2
	SEC Grade 6 to 7	(Equivalent to four General Education Level 2 Subjects)
MQF Level 1	General Education Level 1	VET Level 1
	School Leaving Certificate	

Adapted from Mizzi, C., DeGiovanni, A., Grima, G., Borg, F., Farrugia, V., Grech, V., Portelli, C. and Zahra, E. (2007). A National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning Second Guide.

Appendix II

Pilot Interview Questions

1. Where do you come from?
2. Do you have any brothers or sisters? If yes how many? What are their ages? What do they do?
3. What do your parents do for a living? What about their education?
4. Do you have any hobbies?
5. Do you go out? Belong to any club?
6. Do your parents provide you with financial support and/or any other support?
7. Do you intend to sit for any MATSEC examinations? If yes, how many?
8. Have you sought any career information? How did you do this?
9. Have you ever found any difficulties at school? What kind of difficulties were they?
10. What kind of assessment would you prefer?
11. What will you find difficult when you come to MCAST?
12. What course would you like to do at MCAST?
13. What are your career aspirations?
14. What do you expect to find at MCAST in general?
Facilities/Tutor Support/Friends/Culture/Attitude
15. Will your friends be also attending MCAST or another Post-Secondary School?
16. Would you consider opting for another post-secondary institution?
17. Would you consider working part-time when you come to MCAST?
18. Who is encouraging you to come to MCAST?

Second Interview Questions

Working Group:

- 1 How are you?
- 2 How is your family?
- 3 What is your job?
- 4 How come you did not apply to do a course? How have your plans developed since we last spoke?
- 5 What was the outcome of the results of your MATSEC exams?
- 6 Would you be interested in going back to school? If yes what would your course of studies be?
- 7 Did your family and friends influence you? In what way? How did you take this decision? Did you get any particular advice from anyone who influenced your decisions?
- 8 Did you change in the past year? How?
- 9 These are some of the quotes that I elicited from the interview we held last time. Have any of the things you told me changed?

College Group:

- 1 How are you?
- 2 How is your family?
- 3 What did you choose as your course of studies?
- 4 What was different to your secondary school?
- 5 Are you happy with your course of studies? What do you like? What bothers you?
- 6 Did you get accustomed to BTEC and AAT?
- 7 Do you feel you have changed? How?
- 8 These are some of the quotes that I elicited from the interview we held last time. Have any of the things you told me changed?

Third Interview Questions

1. How are you?
2. At what point are you in your studies or at work?
3. Do you think you have choices ahead of you? What choices do you have?
4. What can you tell me about your work or work placement?
5. Have you had any other work experiences?
6. Which experiences in the past two years were the most helpful and which ones hindered your progression?
7. What would you have done differently if anything about the choices you made? And also the way you went about them?
8. How did you change ever since you came to MCAST or have started full-time employment? Friends? School? Family
9. Do you have time to relax: go out? For hobbies and other activities?
10. Tell me about how you see yourself next year
11. Tell me about how you see yourself in ten years time?
12. What could MCAST have done better?
13. Have a look at what you told me in the last interview. What do you think?

Appendix III

Divizzjoni ta' l-Edukazzjoni
Department ta' l-Ippjanar u Zvilupp
Il-Fanjana



MALTA

Education Division
Department of Planning & Development
Floriana

Request for Research in State Schools

A. (Please use BLOCK LETTERS)

Surname: DE GIOVANNI Name: KATYA
I.D. Card Number: 522375 (M) Telephone: 21 807885 / 79 896384
Address: 150, TRIQ XINTILL, TARKIEN. Post Code: PLA 11.
Faculty: EDUCATION Course: PHD Year: 2005-2009
Area/s of research: TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND FURTHER
EDUCATION
Aims of research: (Underline as appropriate) Long Essay Dissertation Thesis Publication
Estimated duration of research: 3 years Language used: MALTESE AND ENGLISH
Description of method to be used: INTERVIEWS WITH TAPE RECORDING -
MAXIMUM CONFIDENTIALITY WILL BE MAINTAINED.
School/s where research is to be carried out: SIR ADRIAN DINGLI GIRLS' J.L.
VERDALA BOYS' J.L. FORTINI BOYS SEC. SCHOOL
ST. ANDREWS' GIRLS' SEC. ZEBTUN GIRLS' J.L.
Years / Forms: 5 Age range of students: 14-16 years

I accept to abide by the rules and regulations re Research in State Schools and to comply with the Data Protection Act 2001.

Warning to applicants - Any false statement, misrepresentation or concealment of material fact on this form or any document presented in support of this application may be grounds for criminal prosecution.

Signature of applicant: Katya De Giovanni Date: 08 / 01 / 07

B. Tutor's Approval (where applicable).

The above research work is being carried out under my supervision.

Tutor's Name: **PROF. ROGER HUGHES** Signature Official Stamp
(in block letters) **(as in previous application)***

C. Education Division – Official Approval

The above request for permission to carry out research in State Schools is hereby approved according to the official rules and regulations.


Assistant Director
(Planning, Policy, Communication & Research)

Raymond Camilleri
Assistant Director Research & Planning

Date **16/01/07** Official Stamp

Conditions for the approval of a request by a student to carry out research work in State Schools

Permission for research in State Schools is subject to the following conditions:

1. The official request form is to be accompanied by a copy of the questionnaire and / or any relevant material intended for use in schools during research work.
2. The original request form, showing the relevant signatures and approval, must be presented to the Head of School.
3. All research work is carried out at the discretion of the relative Head of School and subject to their conditions.
4. Researchers are to observe strict confidentiality at all times.
5. The Education Division reserves the right to withdraw permission to carry out research in State Schools at any time and without prior notice.
6. Students are expected to restrict their research to a minimum of students / teachers / administrators / schools, and to avoid any waste of time during their visits to schools.
7. As soon as the research in question is completed, the Education Division assumes the right to a full copy (in print or on C.D.) of the research work carried out in State Schools. **Researchers are to forward the copies to the Assistant Director Research and Planning, Education Division.**
8. Researchers are to hand a copy of their Research in print or on C.D. to the relative School/s.
9. In the case of video recordings, researchers have to obtain prior permission from the Head of School and the teacher of the class concerned. Any adults recognisable in the video are to give their explicit consent. Parents of students recognisable in the video are also to be requested to approve that their siblings may be video-recorded. Two copies of the consent forms are necessary, one copy is to be deposited with the Head of school, and the other copy is to accompany the Request Form for Research in State Schools. Once the video recording is completed, one copy of the videotape is to be forwarded to the Head of school. The Education Division reserves the right to request another copy.

* Kindly see copy of attached tutorial form. This application was resubmitted in order to attach interview questions.